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未踏召喚：ブラッドサイン
The unexplored summon://blood-sign IV
鎌池和馬
イラスト：依河和希
電撃文庫

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Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign — Volume 04

未踏召喚：ブラッドサイン4

鎌池和馬
イラスト：依河和希
デザイン：渡邊宏一（ニイナナイゴオ）

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ふとしかん
未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン④

城山恭介が朝目を覚ますと、あの最悪の未踏級『白き女王』が完璧な新妻モードで手料理を作っていた。そもそも先ほどまで恭介の腕枕で二人は一緒に寝ていたらしい。

……絶望してはいけない。世界はまだ終わってはいないのだから。

最強召喚師たる恭介は甘えてくる女王を抱えながら、自分が置かれた状況を整理する。

なぜか、朝起きるまでの自身の記憶が消えている……。恭介は仕方なく『白き女王』と共闘、謎の要塞に挑む――！

時間無制限で贈る『白き女王』のコスプレ七変化に刮目せよ……！

か-12-65

未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン④

鎌池和馬

電撃文庫

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かまちかずま
鎌池和馬

沼という訳ではないですが、水辺でパシャリ。あまり意識はしていないのですが、ブラッドサインは他のシリーズと比べて水辺が多いような……？

【電撃文庫作品】

とある魔術の禁書目録①～㉒
とある魔術の禁書目録SS①②
新約 とある魔術の禁書目録①～⑭
ヘヴィーオブジェクト シリーズ 計十冊
インデリビレッジの座敷童 全⑨巻
簡単なアンケートです
簡単なモニターです
ヴァルトラウテさんの婚活事情
未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン①～④
とある魔術のヘヴィーな座敷童が簡単な殺人鬼の婚活事情

いかわ
イラスト：仲河和希

【魔法科高校の劣等生 追憶編】コミック版の連載や、アニメ【DOG DAYS】の原画絵も手がけたマルチクリエーター。好きなスープはトムヤムクン。

未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン4
鎌池和馬 イラスト†依河和希

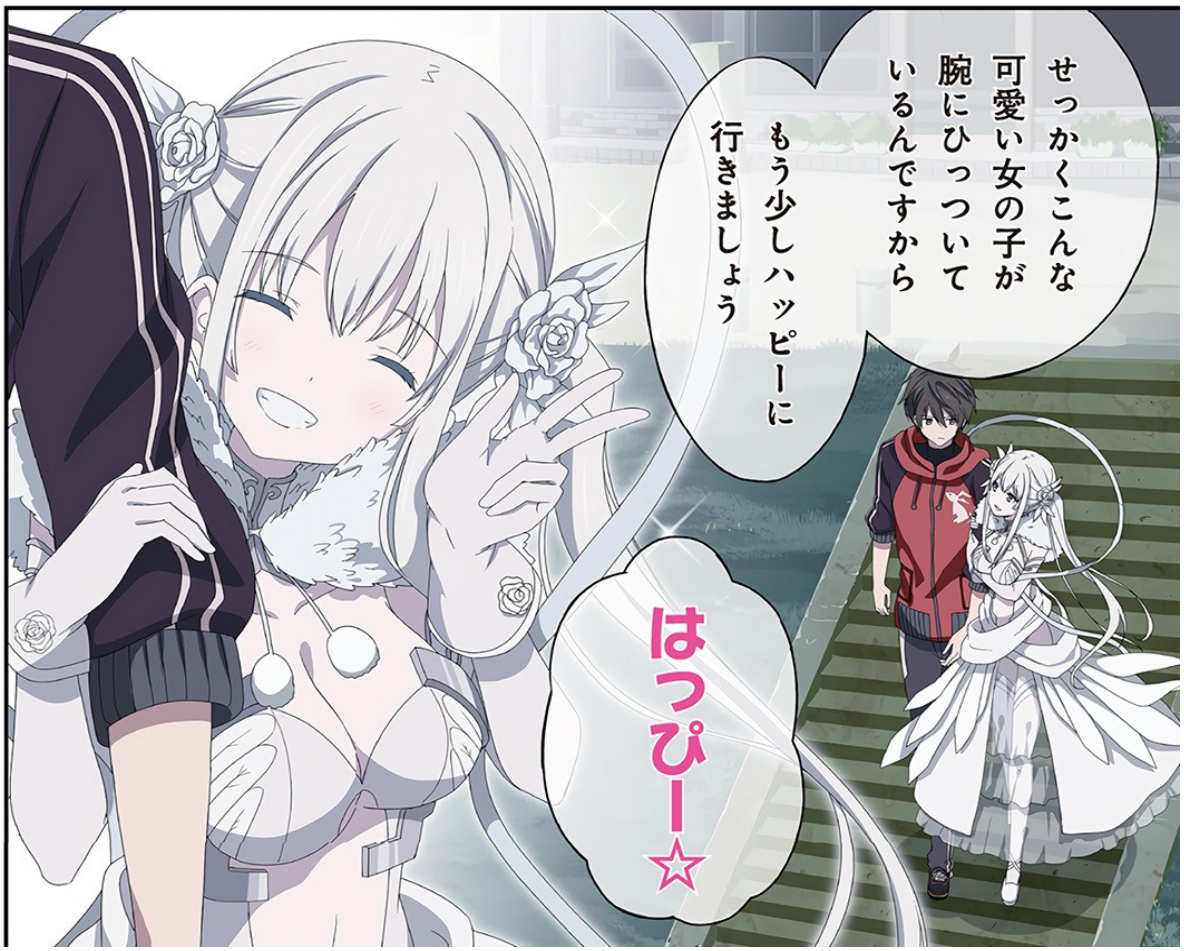
チュン
チュン…
…ん
白き女王【しろき・じょおう】
『白の寵愛』を与えちゃった人(?)。
今回あっさり大前提をぶち破り、
時間無制限バカップルモードを達成☆
とびきり
可愛い寝顔を
ごちそうさまです
あ・に・う・え?

うおおおおおおおお
やん☆
どうして
女王がここに!!?
……
——思い出せ たしか…
目標地点まで
おおよそ
5キロメートル
行くぞ

目指すは
多腕移動要塞
『パンデモニウム』
マックス＝レイヤード
『ガバメント』所属の召喚師。
パンデモニウムに向かう恭介に襲い掛かる。
オレは
勝つためなら
なんでもやる
それは依代も
人工霊場をも
必要とせず
神々の意思を徹底して排除することで
未踏級すら既存の召喚術式を使わずに
行使できる巨大な『匣』
エリ＝スライド
マックスの『依代』。名の知れた調香師で、
ペアの召喚師の実力を飛躍的に
上昇させるというが……。

できるものならやってみやがれッッッ!!
城山恭介【しろやま・きょうすけ】
当代最強の召喚師、そして世界で唯一『白の寵愛』のアワードを持つ少年。幸か不幸かは知らない。
この中に閉じ込められている依代を助け出す
姫川美夏【ひめかわ・みか】
『イリーガル』所属。
パンデモニウム内に囚われた三五三人の『依代』を救い出して欲しいと恭介に『助け』を乞う。

記憶が
欠落している…
ほらほら
あにうぇ
何をこの世の終わり
みたいな顔をして
いるんです？


せっかくこんな
可愛い女の子が
腕にひっついて
いるんですから
もう少しハッピーに
行きましょう
はっぴー☆

あにうえ！
ここはわたくしにアイスをおごってくださいなっ！
あいすっ
あいすっ
もちろんバニラ一択でございます！
なんなんだこの状況は！
どうして貴女はここに存在していられるんだ!!!
……
やはりパンデモニウムに行かないと
この秘密は解けないのか…

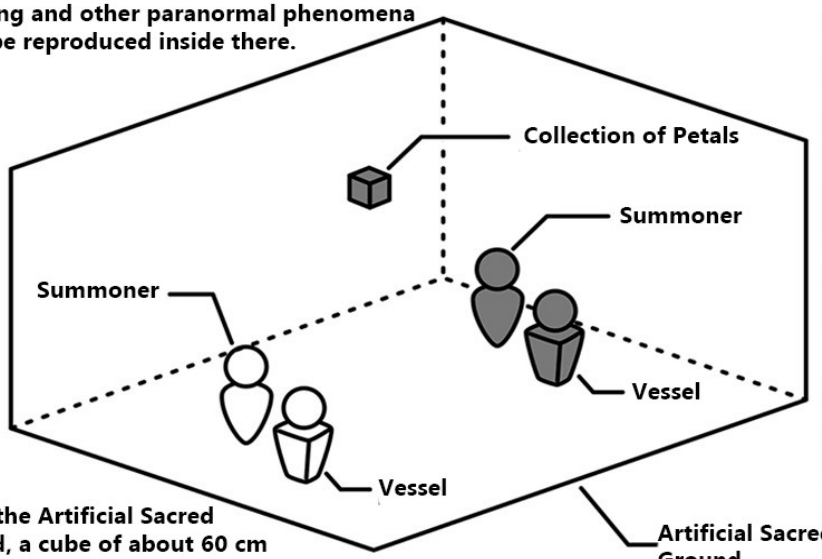
ポニポニ
行け行け
ゴーゴー！
あにうえ
ラブリー☆
なんでいきなり
チアガール…？
もちろん
あにうえの勇気を
奮い立たせるため
ございます！
この健康的に
躍動する肉体美を
ご覧あれー☆
フレー
フレー
フレー
……

Battle Tutorial

The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.

phase 1

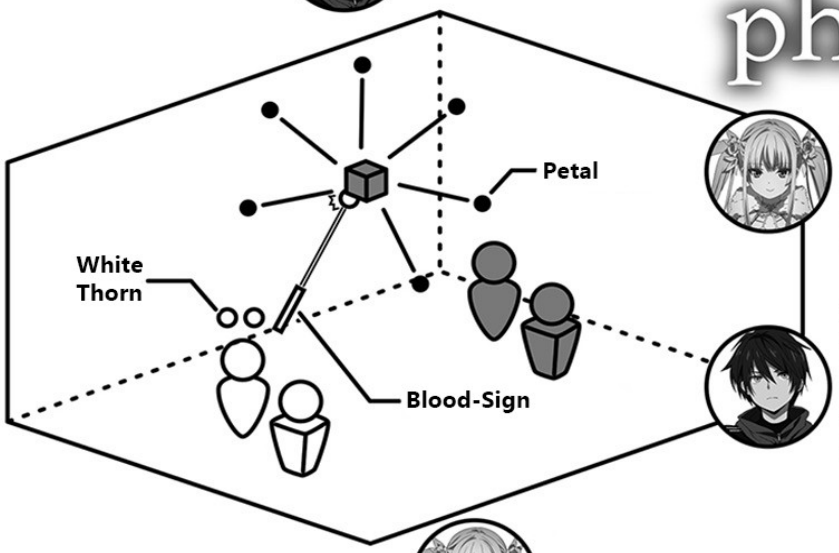
When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.



Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.

It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

phase 2



3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.

You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.

What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.

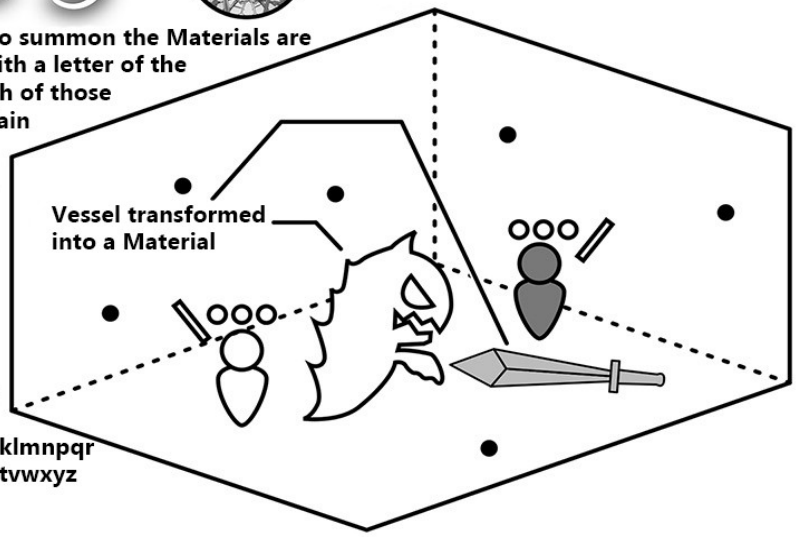
And the vessel's body is used to create...

Battle Tutorial of "The unexplored summon://blood-sign"

phase 3

...a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.

The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.



aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

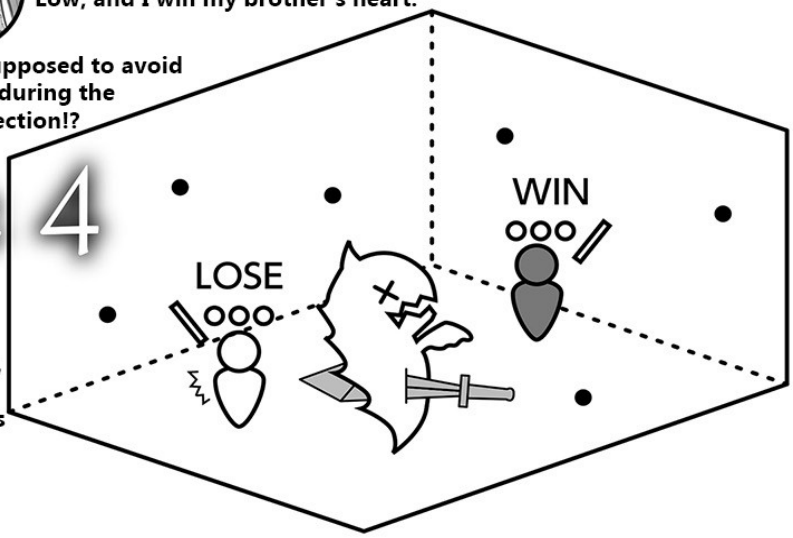
There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.

Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.

Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

phase 4

And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.



The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.

The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.

And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000...hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Phase 1
Upper Cube: Collection of Petals
Left Dark Figure: Summoner
Right Dark Figure: Vessel
Left White Figure: Summoner
Right White Figure: Vessel
Overall Box: Artificial Sacred Ground

K: The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.
Q: When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.
Q: Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.
K: It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

Phase 2
Dark Ball: Petal
White Ball: White Thorn
White Stick: Blood-Sign

Q: 3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.
K: You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.
Q: What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.
K: And the vessel's body is used to create…

Phase 3
White Monster and Dark Sword: Vessel transformed into a Material

Q: …a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.
K: The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.
Q: aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

K: There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.
Q: Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.
K: Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

Phase 4
K: And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.
Q: The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.
K: The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.
Q: And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000…hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Prologue

Is anything impossible?
And if so, is that due to the individual, due to society, due to the world, or due to logic or physical laws?
Hee hee hee. Sorry. It is a little cruel for the strongest of the strong to ask a question like that. Please don't let it get to you, brother.
Nothing is impossible for me.
I am a true queen. I am not bound by logic or the physical laws; they obey my very existence. You could say the "world" is just one of my many unimportant servants.
Isn't it a little late to look so surprised, brother? Ah ha ha! And even if you understand it, that doesn't mean you can accept it. You think there has to be at least one thing that is impossible for me, don't you? Yes, I can see that empty hope in your eyes.
You are so lovably brave, brother.
The world's possibilities or unseen hope? I can't believe you still hold such unconditional trust in those baseless things. Oh, I'm starting to feel a little jealous of the world. I feel like giving it a quick slap to sweep everything clean.
Hee hee. Pardon me. I got a little carried away.
Anyway, brother, how about we test one of them out?
Let's test out something you think has to be impossible. Let's test out something you have subconsciously kept in mind as something not even the White Queen could accomplish. I will relieve you of that delusion.
Oh, dear. There's no reason to tense up like that.
I'm not talking about splitting the earth in two, swallowing the solar system, or balling up the milky way. Besides, I doubt that kind of obvious violence would surprise you at this point.
I'm talking about something more unexpected, more absurd, and more fun. This is a simple possibility that your subconscious defenses have kept you desperately looking away from. It is a mental blind spot that we could call a personal nightmare.
Now, now. What do you think it is?
Think hard, worry plenty, tremble in fear, and fall into the deepest depths. Just make sure you're ready when the time comes, my – dear – brother.

Facts

- The answer is always right in front of your eyes. If you cannot see it, the problem is with your resolve.

Opening X-01: Immediate Game Over

「う」

「うォォォォォあああああああああああああああ

あああああああああああああッッッ!!!???」

(『Now』Opening X-01 Open 06/03 08:45)

オープニングX-01

いきなりのゲームオーバー

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“U-”
“Uooowaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!???”
(“Now” Opening X-01 Open 06/03 08:45)
Immediate Game Over

Shiroyama Kyousuke was dragged from sleep by a loud noise.
“Afwah…ah?”
He rubbed his eyes in bed and his sleepy mind realized something was wrong. Yes, where was he? He lived in Toy Dream 35, a bankrupt regional city that had been bought up by an international entertainment company and remade into an amusement park, so he was used to noise. But an amusement park was all about maintaining an image, so he did not often have the sloppily obvious din of construction pounding at his head.
(Oh…that’s right… I left Toy Dream 35 to visit an international trade show for a job. Wasn’t it…in a large plain near the middle of Hokkaido…?)
Instead of the usual cruiser cabin, Kyousuke was lying in a boxy room. But instead of a solid resort hotel, a metal container had a window and door attached while being otherwise arranged to look like a guest room. Those rooms had been stacked on top of each other to form a crude hotel. That was why the soundproofing was poor and the early morning chill made its way inside.
International trade shows took many forms, but this one was unprecedented.
It was known as D.R.O.K.
Government, Illegal, and Freedom, the three major powers that belonged to the hidden side of the world, used it to show off and make sales deals for technical research and new weapons of the Third Summoning Ceremony. Tens of thousands of people were participating, but since all of them were summoners and vessels, the bizarre international event was entirely forgotten by everyone outside those categories.
There were of course many conflicting plans and schemes at work, so there was work to be done for a summoner like Kyousuke.
“…”
His blood was circulating poorly, so he lay in the only bed and stared blankly up at the LED lightbulb on the ceiling.
He was drawing a blank on a portion of his memories.
He had little experience with alcohol, but he wondered if this was what a hangover felt like.
He felt like he had forgotten a lot of other things, but he also felt like they would come back to him once his mind cleared.
“Hee hee. Thank you for letting me see how cute you are as you sleep, my – dear – brother.”

If, that is, it were not for the White Queen’s voice that was so pure it plunged the world into the depths of despair.
“U-”
There was something under the blanket.
It was close by…no, it was pressing right up against him. He felt something as smooth and soft as marshmallow and a warmth that enveloped his body more gently than sleep. His nose detected a sweet rosy aroma that infected the deepest parts of his mind. All of it was of the finest quality, but it set off an explosion of alarm bells throughout Shiroyama Kyousuke’s entire body.
It was right next to him.
It was gently resting its head on his outstretched right arm.
The powerful summoner slowly turned his head. He prayed that he was mistaken, but it was too frightening a possibility to ignore and he had to peek into the abyss. There, so close that their lips were about to touch, he found sparkling silver twintails and-
*“Uooowaaa

The sound after that was as intense as the beat of a drum that stood taller than a person.
Kyousuke could not even scream or shout anymore.
He was thrown from the bed and his back slammed into the door. After a few seconds, gravity finally tugged him down. He was already unconscious.
That said, it could have been much worse.
For one thing, it was out of the ordinary for a human to come into contact with a Material from another world without the benefit of a protective circle. And this was the White Queen who reigned supreme above the Regulation-, Divine-, and Unexplored-classes.
Of course, this was thanks to the White Queen's extreme "restraint", much like grabbing a raw egg with a piece of heavy machinery.
"Oh, dear."
The White Queen tilted her head a bit as she looked to her beloved lying unconscious on the floor.
She continued staring at Shiroyama Kyousuke without ever growing tired of it.
"This is a real problem. This is already the 45th time since dawn. He really needs to wake up properly soon. Otherwise, he can't eat the oh-so-sweet breakfast I made for him☆"
He had not used an Incense Grenade, there was no Artificial Sacred Ground setup around them, and there were no red Petals or dark Spots floating around. He had not opened the path to the Unexplored-class after summoning one hundred Regulation-classes and fifty Divine-classes and he had not spelled out that dreadful name.
And yet the White Queen was here. And without the ten minute time limit.
How had this happened?
The answer was likely found in Shiroyama Kyousuke's missing memories…

Facts

- Government, Illegal, and Freedom are holding an International Summoning Ceremony Trade Show known as D.R.O.K. in Hokkaido. All of the tens of thousands of participants are summoners and vessels.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke came to Hokkaido on some kind of job.
- Kyousuke is missing a portion of his memories.
- The White Queen has appeared in front of Kyousuke. It does not seem to have been with the normal Blood-Sign method and she

does not seem to be restricted to an Artificial Sacred Ground or ten minute time limit. The details of the setup are unknown at the current time.

- The White Queen seems to be very cheerful this time.

Opening X-02: Another Infiltration Mission

「対象は『イリーガル』の護衛みたいですけど」

「三大勢力のどこだって同じさ、

結局根っこはデルタストン家で繋がっている」

(『Past』Opening X-02 Open 06/01 02:00)

オープニングX-02

潜入ミッションをもう一つ

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“But your target seems to be Illegal bodyguards.”
“All three major powers are the same. They’re all connected to the Deltaston family if you dig deep enough.”
(“Past” Opening X-02 Open 06/01 02:00)
Another Infiltration Mission

Two days earlier.
The flat green earth continued to the horizon. Countless manmade lights swept away the late night darkness. What should have been a pastoral grassy field was filled with enormous structures. Military contractors, pharmaceutical companies, and countless other corporations and groups had flashy outdoor booths set up as well as giant indoor displays that resembled circus tents. There were also lodging facilities and the rest of the infrastructure to support the lives of the thousands on the staff and the guests who numbered ten times that. There were legends of an entire city being built to film a single Hollywood movie back before CG had hit its prime, but this was on an equally large scale. This was D.R.O.K., a temporary city built just for a ten day event.
It was currently two in the morning.
Laser art and fireworks colored the night sky and the guiding voices of staff members never ceased. And of course, the many people watching it all were an indispensable part of the whole.
Men, women, boys, and girls filled the entire area.
The crowds were as dense as a subway platform during rush hour and, shockingly, every last one of them was a summoner or vessel involved in the Summoning Ceremony.
One pair whispered just behind the great commotion.
“(Over here, Kyousuke-kun! I’ll leave the exact method to you.)”
“(Sure. Let’s get this over with quickly. This is different from the normal setup. Everyone around us is a summoner or vessel, so we can’t assume people will forget about us as soon as they look away.)”
One was Shiroyama Kyousuke, a black-haired boy wearing a red hoodie and sports brand track pants while holding a Repliglass Blood-Sign.
He was being guided by a young woman in her early twenties. She had glossy black hair, but a blue shine was hidden in the black. A soft and fluffy scrunchie held that hair in a ponytail which had enough volume to reach her waist. The sexy woman wore a deep navy blue suit with a tight skirt.
Her most unique feature was probably the intentional tears in the sides of her skirt and the purposeful rips in her stockings.
She also wore a brand-name shoulder bag over her shoulder and, for some reason, wore a whistle on a thin chain around her neck. She wore stilettos, but she moved swiftly through the dark night without making even the slightest noise.
She was Kyousuke’s vessel.

Her name was Himekawa Mika and she originally belonged to Illegal.
All vessels shared a certain trait. They wore some kind of restraints that bound their heart and prevented evil and vengeful spirits from taking over their body when not summoning something. In her case, it was the whistle hanging at her neck. The thin chain had a few small decorations attached in addition to the whistle.
One medieval punishment was known as a “sin necklace”.
As a way of disgracing the criminal, icons of their crimes would be attached to a necklace that they were forced to wear. A fist indicated violence, a glass indicated drunken violence, a palm indicated theft, a card indicated gambling-induced debt, and so on. This would naturally gather attention and make them a target of negative rumors, so it made their social life a challenge. A modern version might be attaching a GPS transmitter to a sex criminal’s ankle so that anyone could see their location at all times.
In Himekawa Mika’s case, the icons were a mug, a pair of lips, and a twelve-sided die.
Wearing a torn skirt and stockings in public was another form of public shaming. All of it had likely been carefully fine-tuned to match the vessel’s psychology.
“——————”
They were running right behind a brightly lit outdoor stage. Countless eyes were focused on that symbol of the extraordinary, but the darkness just outside that light was a complete blind spot.
The people out front only saw the sales pitch being made through lip service and a microphone performance.
“Today we will be introducing projection summon bombing. Unlike the existing Blood-Sign system, the summoner and vessel need not actually visit the scene. Plus, there is no need to fear losing control of an unruly Material and you are guaranteed to achieve the same stable results every single time. We promise you all it will be a perfectly safe and one-sided game that does not even require a hit & away strategy! Just watch our demonstration!!”
The microphone picked up the announcer snapping his fingers.
A moment later, the night vanished.
A blinding flash of light burst near the horizon. That should have been at least five kilometers away, but a powerful gust of wind swept across them and Kyousuke had to tackle the tight skirt woman to the ground. Scorching pain stabbed into his skin. Just like after sunbathing, his back was covered with a slight pain that made him think thousands of thin needles were pricking him.
“Ghh!! Wh-what…what was that!?”
“Shh. We expected something like this, didn’t we?”
Kyousuke silenced the words that left Himekawa’s voice almost on reflex.
If they had seen it from the sky, they might have understood. A dome-shaped explosion had covered a diameter of precisely 2000 meters. And it

was unnatural for an explosion on that scale to not trigger any secondary atmospheric changes such as a mushroom cloud. Most importantly, the light had not been a blinding pure white; it had been the purple of glow-in-the-dark paint.
(That must have been the Unexplored-class Lady of Purple Lightning. They used a traditional magic circle, but they intentionally omitted the central vessel. The exposed power directly fills the outside world as a light so bright you can't even see the Unexplored-class in question. If they were trying to weaponize it by creating a territory of death, then I guess they succeeded. Or maybe I should say they've made the gods obsolete.)
"How about that!? The laser range-finding fired from a stealth bomber instantly calculated out the contours of the terrain, projection mapping was used to optically project the largescale magic circle on the three-dimensional surface without the slightest flaw, and the Unexplored-class was positioned in the center of that region. There are countless legends that represent divine power as light that annihilates any who see it who are inexperienced or have broken a taboo. We have removed the cover known as a vessel and successfully drawn out that pure, piercing power. This is the strategy of a new age. We in Government will end everything before any summoner can even throw an Incense Grenade!! After all, the explosion of power is not just an instantaneous thing! It will continue indefinitely until an exorcism circle is added on! We set it at 2000 meters here in the interest of safety, but if we liked, we could increase the scale tenfold or project it from a satellite rather than a bomber!!"
The purple light enveloped everything a second and third time.
A few times in the past, the White Queen had appeared without a vessel, but this phenomenon had not been seen. There was a simple reason for that. There had either been other safeties in place or the Queen herself had kept her power under control so that she could see Kyousuke.
The sight blew away the darkness of the night, but it actually separated the scene into the two extremes of light and shadow. As long as someone stayed in the shadow, the crowds would not notice them. Kyousuke and Himekawa moved from shadow to shadow in the gaps between explosions.
This frightening insanity completely ignored the existing Blood-Sign system. But the commotion was not confined to the one location.
The hosts of the other booths were holding their own microphones and trying to outdo each other.
"Our Attach Saint Project does not send the Material itself into the vessel but instead injects it inside the Repliglass equipped by the summoner. Now, only Divine-class weapons can be summoned, but this allows you to borrow the power of the gods while thoroughly eliminating the will of the gods."
"Previous Incense Grenades have primarily been based on their compatibility with the summoner, but how about this? Why not change your viewpoint and adjust the incense ingredients for compatibility with the Material you wish to summon!? Doing so can make it easier to contact

Divine-classes from a set mythology or Unexplored-classes associated with a specific color, but it also makes it more difficult to contact anything else. While your opponent is confused, we predict you can unilaterally shift the battle in your favor."
"Our Holy Key Women are extremely high precision vessels while also almost entirely eliminating the risk of natural possessions by vengeful and evil spirits. Pay careful attention to her back near the shoulder blades. If you insert the authorization key in the keyhole there…"
None of them feared the gods.
It was a trade show for products that arrogantly made tools of the paranormal.
"D.R.O.K… The Divine Right of Kings, hm?"
Every last one of the products was awful.
The Blood-Sign system was a complex system including an Artificial Sacred Ground, Petals, White Thorns, Spots, and more, but all of it had meaning. At this point, it would be meaningless to explain just how risky it was to take shortcuts.
And not even Government, Illegal, and Freedom could develop enough alternative Summoning Ceremony systems to fill these hundreds of booths.
There was a reason for all of it.
Yet another purple flash highlighted a giant silhouette.
"Pandemonium," groaned the woman with a bluish-black ponytail. "It sure is big."
The giant trade show was built in the northern land, but its structure was incredibly clear. The booths, stages, lodging facilities, and everything else were arranged in a ring with a diameter of ten kilometers and the largest structure of all sat in the very center. At first glance, its silhouette may have been reminiscent of the giant rock in Australia known as Ayers Rock, but it was far too sinister-looking.
Not counting a city's largescale management infrastructure, it was the world's largest standalone piece of Repliglass.
The pitch black center was shaped like a gigantic coffin and a total of ten thick propulsion tentacles extended from the bottom like oil pipelines. Altogether, it was shaped like a giant squid lying on its side.
It was known as Pandemonium, but it was not just a building. It was said to be a mobile fortress that could move autonomously across both land and water. Incidentally, the Lady of Purple Lightning explosions had been occurring outside the ring.
And at the same time…
"No one can develop non-Blood-Sign methods that easily. I had heard before arriving that Pandemonium is a giant Box, but I didn't think it would distort things to this extent…"
A Box.
That was something Kyousuke had seen during the recent Anthill incident involving Girl's Backdoor and Biondetta Shiroyama. It was a personal

summoning device that Government had used for the Red Lady, one of the Three of the Unexplored-class.
But this one was much larger.
The scale was far greater and it was more generic.
“Yes, I hear more than 90% of the new systems being displayed here at D.R.O.K. are being supported with a link to Pandemonium. And Pandemonium itself is the biggest product of all, built as a joint project between Government, Illegal, and Freedom.”
It was very strange if one thought about it.
Those three major powers were in constant conflict, so why would they gather their secrets together to create a single trump card? The risk of leaked information was far too great and then they could start fighting over who would use the completed trump card.
But unnatural things always came with an unnatural benefit.
(Basically, that’s a supercomputer that can perform any calculations and the booths are all terminals. It can do everything from searching for recipes to calculating missile trajectories, so everyone has their own use for it and their possibilities expand endlessly.)
Kyousuke and Himekawa steadily approached their destination while circling behind the booths and studios.
On the way, he stopped behind cover and pulled out his smartphone. The VIP was likely making his microphone performance in front of the stage, but that was not the main dish. Kyousuke pictured the men in black waiting just below the brightly lit stage.
“Okay, I’ve opened an illicit port on the bodyguards’ devices. Now we can spy on them all we want. It’s all thanks to the key picker I bought from Lu-san.”
“But your target seems to be Illegal bodyguards.”
“All three major powers are the same. They’re all connected to the Deltaston family if you dig deep enough.”
They made one last movement and peered into the darkness from behind the booth.
“Now, that’s step one toward infiltrating Pandemonium.”
They were only allowed in the ten kilometer ring and they could not approach Pandemonium in the center. If they did set foot on the grassy field between, they would be caught by the invisible net of microwave anti-personnel radars and infrared searchlights. Summoners and vessels vanished from all cameras and sensors when they were using an Incense Grenade, but the five kilometer distance was hardly fair. It was not an impossible distance to cover, but it would take quite a bit of creativity.
And at the moment, that did not matter.
Kyousuke and Himekawa had different plans.
(Booth #00D51. Good.)
“Hh!!”

With a short breath, the young male employee taking a break out back was knocked out by Kyousuke. Kyousuke was willing to use anything at his disposal. And at the moment, the thing flying through the air was gathering the most attention. He reached for the spare equipment the unconscious man was holding.
The man's armband showed which booth he worked at.
And keeping backup equipment on hand was standard practice in case something malfunctioned.
"This should work. I'll be borrowing this."
It looked like a bazooka, but it did not fire a projectile.
But in a way, the end result was even greater than an anti-tank weapon.
Kyousuke was willing to grab equipment on the scene if he could use it. He rested it on his shoulder with practiced ease, peered through the finder, and accurately stared at the target five kilometers away.
"Laser lock…ready."
"Understood. If you have any further requests, we should be able to deceive them. Ready when you are."
"Begin targeting."
"Targeting confirmed. Guidance started."
A moment later, the Lady of Purple Lightning explosion fired by the bomber completely enveloped Pandemonium in the center.
The explosion of exposed power brought a prickling and scorching pain to his skin even several kilometers away. Kyousuke clenched his teeth, sent an exorcism request, and then tossed aside the bazooka-like device.
Whoever was in charge of the booth was likely sweating bullets at the moment.
But Kyousuke and Himekawa did not care.
False guidance from a third party had enveloped Pandemonium in a dome of light. Of course, it was not built so poorly that it would melt from *only this*.
Then again, that was the real problem here.
Kyousuke glanced down at his smartphone.
"Good, good. The shocked VIPS are making an emergency evacuation. The bodyguards are all transmitting the evacuation manuals they normally never distribute. This should give us every last route within D.R.O.K. And of course, *that includes the internal routes and evacuation routes for Pandemonium.*"
What was most important when it came to infiltrating a secure facility?
Was it a special drill that could break through any wall? Was it an almighty ID card that allowed one to pretend to be anyone else? Was it a ninja hood that turned one's body invisible?
It was none of those.
The real answer was intelligence. It was the diagrams on the location one needed to infiltrate.
"Now, then."

“This gives us a starting point. This trouble should put them on high alert, but we can’t help that. You need a foothold if we’re going to climb a sheer cliff.”
After downloading all the necessary information, the boy stared at Pandemonium’s giant silhouette that remained unchanged even after the purple light cleared away.
“The next step is prying open the thick doors.”
The core of the fortress came to mind.
He was reminded of just what carried out the calculations.
“It’s finally time to save the 353 vessels being used as cogs inside that giant machine.”
Those were the cursed words that had been spoken to Alice (with) Rabbit this time.
“That completes our current objective. And this confusion should assist our withdrawal. We need to bring back these diagrams and analyze them for a way inside, so we need to-…”
“No, wait…”
Kyousuke held his finger to his lips to silence the woman and then pointed in a different direction.
The sudden “friendly fire” had triggered localized chaos here and there and the some of the crowds were falling over in their panic, but there was also a different sort of commotion.
It was near a bright booth a few hundred meters away.
They could not hear exactly what the angry voices were saying, but one of the bodyguard smartphones he had used to steal the evacuation manuals was there. He peeked into the flow of data, linked to the microphone and camera, and listened in on the conversation.
“Read the manual, you fool! That isn’t how you use a Holy Key Woman!! Dammit, they’re supposed to be airdropped into the enemy formation and then activated!!”
“Eh? Eh? Wahh!?”
“You panicked from the friendly fire and then turned the key!? Now a Divine-class is going to appear in the middle of this crowd!!”
“We have to do some-…ohhhh!?”
A light much more sinister than the manmade ones filled one section of the trade show.
Something whirled around near the booth in question.
There was no Artificial Sacred Ground, no Petals, and no Spots. But the power of the gods of legend had been concentrated and given form. It had been summoned with a system other than the Blood-Sign system. And of course, it had skipped some steps using the power of the gigantic Box known as Pandemonium.
Kyousuke clicked his tongue.
If the friendly fire had triggered a panic that led to this, a portion of the responsibility fell on his shoulders.

“Mika.”
“That’s Mika-*san*, you damn kid. You’re going to go save them, aren’t you?”
“We’re using the chaos to escape, right? Then we can show off a little without anyone noticing.”
The two of them ran through the darkness. All the while, a disconcerting vibration spread irregularly. They could see the change from where they were. “It” looked a lot like a surfer. A beautiful blonde woman with ribbons around her body had a black mass below her feet like a big wave. That mass was actually a collection of thousands if not tens of thousands of snakes. Kyousuke groaned as he combined that with the information on his smartphone.
“Divine-class. Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 6. That’s Adam’s first wife. This is a powerful enemy…”
“The Holy Key Women Project is run by Illegal. It performs a Summoning ceremony by unleashing special power with the locking and unlocking action of a complex lock. I believe the system is based on witchcraft. It is an application of a technique that stored the power of wind in the knots of a rope and performed magic by untying those knots.”
“But at its core, it’s the same as the aerial bombardment from that bomber. Unstable summons that omit the Blood-Sign are indiscriminate by nature. You’re apparently meant to unlock it in the middle of enemy territory so the rampaging Divine-class can wreak indiscriminate havoc on them. That makes this a real problem. Who knows how far the damage will spread after summoning something like that in the middle of your own troops. It’s like pulling the pin from a grenade and then carelessly releasing the lever.”
As he read through the data, his access was suddenly denied.
But not because they had noticed him. The device he was hacking into had likely been destroyed. He could only pray its owner was okay.
Luckily, only summoners and vessels were attending D.R.O.K. They would be forming pairs and fighting.
The Blood-Sign system required starting at the Regulation-class, but it could reach up to the Unexplored-class. Horrifyingly enough, that included the White Queen. They would be able to defeat the Holy Key Woman who could not move past the Divine-class.
But that was only if they could build up their Materials. If they tried to fight with the weakest Cost 1 Regulation-classes, they would be swallowed up and instantly killed by the Divine-class big wave. At the scene of the fight, there were probably quite a few summoners and vessels lying on the ground after receiving the shock of seeing their god killed before their eyes. A Level 1 hero could eventually defeat the demon king after earning enough experience points, but challenging the demon king at Level 1 gave them no chance to grow.
“What should we do?” Himekawa Mika made a suggestion as she ran alongside him. “Do you want to use my lock?”

The woman with the navy blue tight skirt turned her back toward Kyousuke. No, that was not quite accurate. She flicked open the skirt's side hook and slid the skirt down. This revealed the area on the back of her hips just above the tailbone. But there was more than bright skin there. Something unusual could be seen there.
It was golden metal the size of a video disk.
And in the center was the kind of highly specialized keyhole seen on laboratory doors.
This was another oddity powered by Pandemonium.
She was one of the Holy Key Women.
By inserting and turning the key, one could summon a predetermined Divine-class.
Based on what Kyousuke had heard, the vessel's mental state was instantly tuned by having them recall wings, a tail, or some other organ that humans should not have. That allowed the instant summoning of the Divine-class corresponding to the internal structure of the lock.
"No."
But Kyousuke immediately rejected the offer.
"I have some stun and smoke grenades in addition to the normal Incense Grenades. I can buy some time by drawing its attention with those. The best I can hope for is fifty seconds, but I don't have to worry about another summoner in this case, so that's more than enough time to hit the Petals into the Spots. I can directly summon an Unexplored-class like that and that will allow me to fight without being killed instantly."
"Then…?"
He gripped his Blood-Sign and stared at the Divine-class woman riding the wave of tens of thousands of snakes.
"Yes. It's about time I showed them the true Summoning Ceremony."

Facts

- Shiroyama Kyousuke was participating in the D.R.O.K. Summoning Ceremony Trade Show since at least a few days prior.
- Kyousuke has a contract with the Illegal vessel named Himekawa Mika.
- D.R.O.K. is demonstrating several new systems other than the Blood-Sign system, but most of those are apparently borrowing the power of the giant Box known as Pandemonium.

- D.R.O.K. and Pandemonium are supposedly a joint project between the three major powers of Government, Illegal, and Freedom, but Kyousuke also mentioned the term “Deltaston family”.
- Himekawa is part of the Holy Key Women Project, so she has a keyhole just above her tailbone which can summon a specific Divine-class into her body just by inserting and turning a key.
- 353 vessels are trapped inside Pandemonium. This corresponds to the number of quatrains in a certain book of prophecy and the Third Summoning Ceremony was discovered in 1999, but it is unknown if there is a connection.
- Kyousuke and Himekawa acquired diagrams of Pandemonium, giving them a starting point to infiltrate the facility.

Stage 01: The Cutest Escape Game in the World?

「わたくしが何故白を司るのかお分かりですか」

「それはあにうえの色に染めてもらうためでございます！　きゃー☆」

(『Now』Stage01 Open 06/03 09:00)
(『Past』Stage01 Open 05/31 09:30)

ステージ01

世界で一番可愛い脱出ゲーム？

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Do you know why my color is white?”
“Because that way I can be dyed in your colors, brother! Kyah☆”
(“Now” Stage 01 Open 06/03 09:00)
(“Past” Stage 01 Open 05/31 09:30)
The Cutest Escape Game in the World?

Part 1

(Timeline “Now”)
After repeating the waking up and passing out process a few more times, Shiroyama Kyousuke finally seemed to realize something.
He could not win.
There was simply no way he could defeat the White Queen who was currently humming in the kitchen space while shaking her small butt back and forth.
“Hm, hmm, hm, hm, hm, hm, hmmm☆ Oh, to think the day would come when I could serve breakfast for my brother! This reminds me of our time in that miniature garden. Hee hee hee.”
(C-calm down. Calm down, me!! If I look at this in the right way, it’s the greatest opportunity I’ve ever had. I need to view this as the perfect chance to pull off some trial & error against the Queen who could kill me instantly anywhere and at any time!! Remember, you won’t receive a miracle like this again. Use this as a chance to thoroughly work out her characteristics, traits, weaknesses, and flaws!!!!!!)
There were times when people had to force their thoughts in a positive direction to stay sane.
With his back pressed against the wall, his butt on the floor, and a throbbing weight in his head, Kyousuke changed his train of thought.
D.R.O.K, the Summoning Ceremony international trade show, the Deltaston family, Pandemonium, 353 vessels, and an attempt to save them…
He could remember a few things, but pieces were missing.
Were his lost memories due to the White Queen tormenting him over and over, or was there some other cause? Kyousuke could not tell given how beat up he was this early in the morning.
He decided to ask the first question that came to mind.
“Where is my vessel, Himekawa Mika…?”
“Oh, come on now.”
He heard a dull sound.

As the White Queen looked back in grinning newlywed mode, she had crushed the handle of the frying pan she held.
“Is that any way to greet me first thing in the morning, brother? Why *the hell* would you ruin the mood by mentioning another girl’s name in front of me on this nice sunny day?”
She had no choice but to directly hold the edge of the frying pan as she shook it above the gas burner, but her smile did not falter in the slightest. A sizzling sound came from her hand, but she did not seem to be in any pain.
Sweat poured from Kyousuke’s body, but he still tried to think.
(What in the world happened after that? It does seem to be connected to Himekawa Mika…but does that mean she might be *inside* the White Queen as a vessel?)
The situation was far too irregular from the moment the White Queen had been indefinitely summoned without relying on a Blood-Sign or Incense Grenade. He did not have enough information to work with, but Himekawa Mika supporting the White Queen as a vessel would be the worst case.
That would mean the Queen had stolen his vessel.
Without a vessel, he could not summon Materials and he was not aware of a way to cancel a contract with a vessel who was currently possessed by a Material.
It was a lot like locking the keys in the car.
He needed a vessel to fight the White Queen, but he needed to do something about the White Queen to take his vessel back.
He could not fight at the moment.
In a way, this may have been an extraordinary chance to continue fighting against the powerful White Queen with no time limit, but he was not one to rejoice at that.
“Okay, brother! Breakfast is ready!! You were still living a life of cereal and milk in the mornings, weren’t you? But I used all my skill to make you a special wife’s meal that’s good for the body and soul!! Eat up☆”
As the White Queen lined up dish after dish on the table, there was no apparent malice in her.
Although that was what made her so very frightening.
“…”
Kyousuke cautiously observed her behavior, but the food itself had done nothing wrong. And if he upset her now, he could easily be turned into a red juice to go along with it. He sat at the table despite the heavy weight in his stomach.
And as he observed the meal, one thought came to mind.
“It’s all white.”
“That’s my identity.”
“But it’s too white! What is this lineup!? Potato salad, white stew, stir-fried cauliflower and white asparagus, and even hot milk to drink!? Any one of them would be fine, but it looks downright psychedelic all together like this!!”

“If you don’t know where to start, I recommend the chicken or the white-fleshed fish. Hee hee. And don’t overlook that I made sure to cut off the bread crust. We don’t need anything that isn’t white!!”
“That’s blasphemy! The crust is the best part when it’s all toasted and crunchy!”
“Why would I make it golden brown? Now, brother, eat it untoasted. I recommend putting either margarine or white chocolate paste on it.”
The White Queen gave him a beaming smile from across the table.

The look on her face said she would tear open his belly and shove it directly into his stomach if he refused.
After a heavy sigh, he grabbed the chopsticks.
He started with a cautious bite of the stir-fried vegetables.
“Oh, it’s good.”
“Hee hee.”
“The food itself is actually pretty good. It’s well made.”
“Hee hee hee hee hee!! Of course it is. I have to be able to cook if I’m going to be a good wife for you, brother. Do you know why my color is white? Because that way I can be dyed in your colors, brother! Kyah☆”
He gave his honest opinion because being disagreeable would get him nowhere, but the White Queen placed her hands on her cheeks and started shaking back and forth.
And since Kyousuke could tell it was good while under so much stress he felt like he had a bowling ball in his stomach, it would likely be recognized as good by anyone.
After that, the White Queen joined him in eating the food on the table. It was a mystery whether that peak of the Unexplored-class needed to ingest nutrients or if she could even starve if she was deprived of food, but she seemed happy at least making a show of eating the food.
“Queen.”
“What is it?”
“I won’t ask why you’re here. That would be too direct and would only make me feel empty inside. So tell me this: does your presence here have something to do with Pandemonium?”
“Oh, dear. Does that mean you *reallllly* don’t remember a thing?”
“…”
“Hee hee. Then I think I will keep my silence. After all, if you were to remember that dream-like time, this might all fall apart.”
Her teasing way of speaking made him nearly break the chopsticks he held, but that would have been meaningless. He could never hope to match the White Queen in violence, so any show of force would only make her smile like a mother praising her child.
But a human’s weapon was not their strength. He refocused his thoughts and worked to keep his cool.
“Let’s review the situation, Queen.”
“I am open to any topic that means I can converse with you, brother.”
“The Summoning Ceremony trade show named D.R.O.K. is officially a joint project run by Government, Illegal, and Freedom. It lies one step away from reconciliation and is a necessary step toward a historical turning point that will end this age of fruitless conflict.” Kyousuke spoke as if he were blankly keeping the gears in his mind turning. “But it’s actually run by the Deltaston family. They are a member of the Round Table just like the Magentarain family and they have formed a gigantic border-crossing faction by sending skilled summoners to each of the three major powers.”

“In other words, the joint project is the Deltaston family’s way of expanding their power. Particularly Pandemonium. That would normally devolve into the three major powers bickering over who gets to use it and it would never function properly. But with influential members of the same family making adjustments in each of those major powers, it can function just fine. It has effectively become a toy for the exclusive use of that family.”
“D.R.O.K. …The divine right of kings. The name sure fits. They’ve built up an absolute power that none of the three major powers can interfere with while also letting those major powers argue themselves into a standstill over who gets to use Pandemonium. While they’re all too busy keeping each other from doing anything, the Deltaston family can stop hiding their giant faction and establish their unrestricted position in the Summoning Ceremony world. Pandemonium functions as both the gas and the brakes.”
That giant trade show was officially funded jointly by the three major powers, but it was effectively only put together by the members of the Deltaston family who had infiltrated those major powers. In a way, this was their kingdom. The king at the top would be occupying an entire luxury resort hotel while defended by elites from all three major powers.
“This might be off topic a bit, but why would the Deltaston family purposefully build their base outside of Pandemonium?” asked the Queen.
“It’s obvious why they would use a resort hotel. They aren’t the type of people who find comfort in a bunch of crude weapons.”
“Is that something like how a supercomputer is convenient, but no one wants to be anywhere near the actual computer kept at a several dozen degrees below zero and surrounded by powerful electromagnetic waves?”
“They probably prefer to keep their distance while still being able to send in a request for the power of a Divine- or Unexplored-class. I mean, that thing’s a giant mobile fortress that uses Unexplored-classes at its leisure. I bet the inside is full of tricks to distort one’s spiritual cognizance. An experienced summoner or vessel might be fine, but the Deltaston family stays below Award 100 to fit into normal society, so their autonomic nerves would be fried if they stayed there for too long.”
He spoke like he had seen the place before.
And the White Queen giggled before saying more.
“If Pandemonium was developed from its current trial phase and used in earnest, it would bring us to a new age, wouldn’t it? I have no interest whatsoever in what benefits humans, but did no one try to destroy this before that happens?”
“Since it’s still up and running, I guess not. The words that lead mankind to ruin are always the same: surely they wouldn’t go that far.”
Based on the conversation, Kyousuke saw no discrepancy between his understanding and the White Queen’s. As a baseline, this told him the information he had was not erroneous.
That left only one problem: the gap in his memories.
The truth had to be concentrated there.

(Even if the giant Box that is Pandemonium is being used to indefinitely summon the Queen, that won't stop the conflict between the three major powers. That would drive an eternal wedge into the gears. But did the Deltaston family not realize that no human can control her after summoning her!?)
"Brother, can I turn on the TV? I've always been interested in those blood type fortunetelling sections. I hear they always do them during the morning news!"
"What blood type are you anyway? Type X with an Rh of ∞?"
The White Queen was breathing excitedly, so Kyousuke let her have the remote, stacked up the empty dishes, and carried them over the kitchen space's sink. He generally relied on home appliances, but since he lived in a cruiser, he was used to washing dishes by hand to preserve water.
"…"
He briefly glanced over at the knife sitting on the drain board, but that was too simplistic. He doubted anything would change even if he stabbed the White Queen in the back as she faced away from him while engrossed in the flat screen TV. She might even smile as she grabbed him, call him a good boy while patting him on the head, and make him curl up in her lap.
"Brother, brother! They said guys with Type A and girls with Type AB are a perfect match!"
"Didn't I just say your blood type would probably come back as 'error'?"
"Yes. It's most unfortunate, but it would seem I need to go on a worldwide tour to exterminate every last woman with Type AB bloo-…hgyuh!"
"Queen, you have some white stew on your cheek."
"Funyuhhhh…"
Leaving her alone would have led to disaster, so he found an arbitrary reason to toy with her soft cheek through a handkerchief. The twintail girl looked about ready to pass out.
As she let him toy with her like a small child, the White Queen asked a question.
"Wh-what are your plans for the day, brother?"
"Good question." Kyousuke sighed. "Sitting around in my room isn't going to change anything, so I think I'll wander around outside."
"My, my!! So after eating my home cooking, we're going to have a walking date together? Today really is my lucky day! I feel like making it a global holiday!!"
As he watched the White Queen celebrate, Kyousuke added more in his heart.
(And I also need to recovery my lost memories and find a way to kill you.)
The goal had been right before his eyes from the very beginning.
The problem was finding a way to open the door known as the White Queen. He had to rack his brains and use everything available to him.
A girl who had spoken the cursed words might be waiting behind that locked door.

Part 2

(Timeline “Now”)
Trade shows had two primary goals: business and advertisement. The former meant signing contracts for new products and the latter meant showing off your technology to the press. The business side was sometimes based in a desire for the product and was sometimes based on a desire to build up connections. The advertisement side was sometimes used to increase your brand name and increase your ability to sell and compete and was sometimes used to show off your superiority to the competition and drive them into despair.
The people there for the advertisements were focused on the announcements made at special booths at set times. So this early in the morning, most of the people filling the streets were summoners and vessels looking to buy Blood-Signs, Incense Grenades, restraints, Repliglass, or the components and chemicals used to make them.
However…
“……
……”
“C’mon, brother. Why do you look so gloomy that someone would think you’re watching the end of the world? You need to look a little happier walking around with such a cute girl holding onto your arm. Happy☆”
Rather than watching the end of the world, Shiroyama Kyousuke felt like he was standing in the center of the world.
That was hardly surprising when *the* White Queen stood by his side, wrapped her arms around his right arm, leaned her full weight against him, and even rested her head on his shoulder.
The gazes of the passersby were too painful.
In fact…
“Her Majesty? Ehhh!? Her Majesty!!!???”
“Don’t be stupid. That’s got to be cosplay. They have that musical based on the White Queen, remem-…ugyaahhh!! I-i-it’s actually her!?”
“Bubble, bubble, bubble, bubble…”
It went far beyond double takes and wondering whether or not to snap a photo. A large man collapsed on the spot and wept like a small child, a holy woman must have been so shocked she entered nirvana because her eyes rolled back in her head and she foamed at the mouth, a group of what looked like indigenous South Americans prostrated themselves before her with their foreheads pressed against the ground, and a gaudy female fortuneteller began gathering up the dirt the Queen had stepped on and stuffing it into a bag like a high school baseball player at Koshien. Kyousuke

was not sure what to make of it. Humans were said to be the lords of creation, but the second they saw a paranormal being, they were willing to throw out all of their dignity.
Shiroyama Kyousuke's lips grew pale as he spoke his honest thoughts.
"Why couldn't you have considered staying back in my room? If you're going to stand out this much, it would help if I was alone. At this rate, they're going to make a statue of me as well."
"Oh, come now. Only a real man gets to show off his lovely girlfriend like this, brother. Now, hold your head high. You need to let the world know you managed to make me yours."
The White Queen was in full lovey-dovey mode, but Kyousuke could not laugh off this topic since he had earned the award Loved by the White in the past and since he had been targeted by the group of (perverted) summoners known as Guard of Honor.
But the White Queen did not seem at all bothered by the commotion surrounding them.
"Oh, dear. There are so many stands set up. Hmm. The love-filled wife's meal was absolutely crucial, but it would be a shame to pass this up. So, brother! Let us use the logic of having a separate stomach for snacks so you can treat me to some ice cream!!"
"No, that sounds like a pain in the ass. If you want ice cream, ask one of your worshipers for some and they'll make so much for you they'll use up all the ice in the Antarctic."
"You just don't understand how the world works, brother. It only makes your heart flutter when your beloved buys it for you. Ice cream, ice cream! And it has to be vanilla of course!"
"…Why are you so obsessed with the color white? Ugh."
"Because I'm the White Queen who loves all things white!! Hee hee. What were you imagining, brother?"
Since she asked, Kyousuke answered honestly.
And he did so with a blank look on his face.
"Well, I'd thought you were insane but that you still had a line you wouldn't cross. I thought you had an ignorant and pure heart, so this is a bit of a surprise. Yeah, you might be my nemesis, but it's still a shock."
"Fweh!?"
"Lu-san will say a lot of those things, but I'd bet anything she's pure. And do I even have to say anything about a shut-in like Aika? Hmm, but I guess you're the exception…"
"Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-what are you saying!? Don't tell me you're having a sudden onset of maiden delusion now! But make no mistake! It may be true that my worshipers around the world will sometimes hold hard-to-watch rituals in front of my statues and idols in underground temples or aerial cities! But!! I myself am pure!! I simply happen to overhear a lot of inappropriate things! So make no mistake about my purity!!!!!"

She was so panicked that she did not even notice Kyousuke mentioning a few other girls.
Kyousuke used that opening to guide them away from the ice cream stand, but the White Queen noticed.
“Ah, what about my trophy of having a gentleman gallantly buy me a treat!?”
“Stop it. If I take you there now, they’ll dig the wrapper out of the trash and hang it up in a sanctuary somewhere. They’ll probably call it a holy relic or something.”
“Fwehhh, brother!”
“I said no. Besides, if I give in just once, the demands will never stop. I only have so much money in my walle-…”
He was cut off by a metallic clinking sound.
The confused boy watched as a shower of coins was thrown toward them from all directions. In the blink of an eye, the ground at their feet looked like a pond at a tourist destination.
“Please use this! This old man is more than willing to offer some money if it is for Her Majesty!!”
“In fact this feels like too little for the honor of gazing upon her face like this! Kh, curse you, Alice (with) Rabbit. Are you going to demand I make up the difference with my body!?”
“Gozaru, gozaru!! Holder of Loved by the White, you must not make the Queen cry!!”
Kyousuke had triggered quite a commotion, so he quickly shouted back at the people.
“I am not accepting any indirect offerings! The entire world is far too kind to this insane twintails!!”
At that moment, he sensed a sharp gaze from the crowd.
He looked over and spotted two familiar faces.
They were twin shrine maidens.
“(R-Renge. What is that!? I can’t figure out how this could have happened!)”
“(Shh! We’re leaving, Higan! Don’t look that freak in the eye!)”
“(Wow. Um, Shiroyama-san really has changed a lot.)”
“(I can’t believe he’s smugly showing off that dangerous thing. Kh, he should have asked us for help before he was this badly broken!)”
Kyousuke felt the hair across his body bristle.
“Wait! Please waaaaaaaaaaait!! How long have you been here!? Where did you come from!? And do you happen to know anything about my missing memories!?”
“C’mon, don’t be like that, brother. …I mean it. Speak some other girls’ names and we’ll have two new craters on the moon. Got that?”
The White Queen smiled cheerfully and made a point of clinging to Kyousuke’s arm, resting her head on his shoulder, and holding him in place like a ship’s anchor. Meanwhile, the twin sisters vanished into the crowd.
It was a sorrowful parting.

“Ah, ahhh, ahhhhhhh.”
“Okay, brother. What shall we do now?”
He was finally freed, but it was too late.
At this rate, the crowd was going to grow even more excited than a national idol discovered in the middle of a scramble crossing, so Kyousuke grabbed the White Queen’s hand and quickly left. He glanced around on the way, but he saw no sign of any shrine maiden outfits.
Meanwhile, he looked like he was stealing a bride away from the chapel (mostly due to her pure white dress), so…
“Oh, my☆ How bold, brother. I just won another trophy in life.”
“You shut your mouth!! If we had stayed there, they probably would have built a giant monument and the spot would have been marked on world maps as ‘the holy land where offerings were given to our queen in heaven’!! The place could easily end up covered in blood and guts!!”
Of course, if that peak of the Unexplored-class had not wanted to move, she would not have budged even if a passenger jet rammed into her, so the Queen had to be entirely on board with being pulled away by him.
“Ah, what does he think he’s doing!? Is he trying to keep our Queen to himself!? And when simply being able to borrow the power of her name is too great an honor!”
“Gozaru, gozaru!”
“Hm, it would seem I have no choice. I will help out as the Love and Hate Aggressor. Guide rabbit, only you can put such a lovely smile on Her Majesty’s face! Take her with you and get out of here!!”
As small commotions (or at least he prayed they were small) started up here and there, they ultimately found themselves at a viewing platform. But this northern land was a large plain, so it was quite flat. Instead of adding a railing and maintaining the top of a natural hill, it looked more like a large metal lookout tower with the floor space of a cooking classroom or home ec classroom.
It was deserted, but that may have been because everyone here was a summoner or vessel for advertisement or business purposes. There were very few people who had arrived purely as sightseers.
Kyousuke finally breathed a sigh of relief in the four story viewing platform.
“This is awful…! Normal people who didn’t know anything would actually be better because they might walk right past you without realizing your value!!”
“Oh? But in that case, their ignorance would lead to a spiritual awakening. And since they do not know who I am, they might start up some misguided cult.”
There was more to her than simple violence or combat ability.
Before any of that, one had to contend with her presence, her aura, and her charisma. In what looked like some kind of joke, even veteran summoners and vessels who used the gods of legend as a stepping stool would *voluntarily* bow down to this higher life form. Just by standing there, she

could produce worship. Just by smiling, she could fully distort everything that civilization had built up. She was a singularity like a black hole that endlessly sucked in human hearts.
Could you fight that?
Could you even maintain the will to fight her?
A battle with the White Queen began there. And only a very few had honed the blade of their humanity to that point. And if they let their guard down for even a moment, that blade would be instantly worn down and dulled by an invisible power.
Just like his former enemies: Uniquely Selfless Azalea Magentarain, Telomere's End Benikomichi Fuuki, Liar Cat Biondetta Shiroyama, etc.
"Brother."
But the White Queen with her silver twintails and pure white dress merely smiled sweetly and pressed her hands together in front of her chest.
"I do not care what form it takes as long as I can play with you. We could even do exactly as you wish and begin an endless death match where you try again and again to kill me with every method you can think of."
"…"
"But remember that I said I do not care what form it takes. Yes, anything is fine as long as I am satisfied. So wouldn't you be protecting the world by playing with me in a way that avoids needless conflict? For example, if there is no direct battle, there is no chance of the puny summoners and vessels here being killed, so wouldn't you be *saving* them by choosing to go on a date and flirt with me?"
Kyousuke audibly gulped.
This was it. Those words were like a cool glass of water after walking endlessly through the scorching desert. By swapping out the essence of the matter, she could make compromising and giving in sound like the good option. This "first attack" tried to break people's beliefs just by smiling and throwing sweet words their way. If the psychological could be seen, then Kyousuke would be on the verge of being swallowed by the great maw of a carnivorous dinosaur.
"Let's go to a tropical island."
The White Queen leaned up against him and buried her face in his chest while whispering to him.
"If you wish to expel me from the world, there is no need to fight me, brother. All you need to do is seal me away inside a secret garden. As long as I am happy there, I will never leave. I will not even be curious what would happen if I were to leave. I will do anything for you, brother. Do you like one piece swimsuits? Or are two-piece ones or bikinis more your style? Compared to swinging your Blood-Sign around in a fruitless and endless battle, this is bound to be the more constructive choice for the world."
"…"
"I will be satisfied as long as I have you, brother."
If that was all, then she would be telling the truth.

She looked up at him while snuggled up against him from the front.
Her damp eyes glittered and her enchanting lips formed her words.
She looked just like a girl begging for a kiss from her lover.
“I will ask nothing of the world, I will take nothing from the world, and I will threaten nothing in the world. So won’t you please place your arms around my waist?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke imagined that possibility for just a moment.
He could not help himself.
And then he shook his head.
“…That would cause a war.”
“It would not. I am talking about a complete and utter disappearance. It is the desire to monopolize me that triggers conflict, so this would actually remove the possibility of harm from the world.”
“No.”
He mustered all of his strength to turn his back on that easy but fatally sweet poison.
“I am saying it would trigger the final war between the two of us. In that secret garden of yours.”
“Oh, you’re so mean, brother!!”
A complete change came over her.
She puffed her cheeks out like a child.
“…But that is exactly what makes you so worth winning over.”
As the White Queen embraced him from the front and rubbed her face against his chest, the boy leaned against the railing and shook his head to take his eyes off of her.
From that four story height, he could see the donut-shaped trade show and Pandemonium in the center. That colossal Repliglass structure had a giant squid silhouette due to the giant coffin shape with a large number of tentacle-like pipelines attached to the bottom. But he saw a few oddities in that scenery.
There was an empty field within the donut.
And in that field were several craters ranging between several hundred meters and several kilometers across. The patch of green had been cruelly torn up and a water vein must have been hit because they were filled with water like lakes.
And as he viewed that scene, he felt something like a jolt of electricity in the back of his mind.
“…?”
Instead of rejecting the pain, he abandoned himself to it.
He slowly peeled the scab from his memories.
And the first vision that appeared in his mind was of two people he had seen just a moment ago…

Part 3

(Timeline “Past”)
“Do you know who Ellie Slide is?”
Somewhere and at some point, the black-haired shrine maiden named Meinokawa Renge had asked him that.
“She’s apparently a well-known incense expert, but we don’t know where to find her in this crowd.”
“Oh? You have some interesting connections.”
Kyousuke sounded impressed, but Renge sighed frankly.
“It’s not that. We want to hire her to manufacture an Incense Grenade. I had been making them on instinct so far, but someone pointed out there’s a lot of waste in the mixture. But I can’t pinpoint my own idiosyncrasies, so I want to have an expert make a basic one for me that I can use for reference.”
“Hmm. By the way, your sister seems to be napping on her feet. Was it an exhausting trip?”
“Higan! Don’t try to escape reality just because it’s a complicated subject!! C’mon, you’re drooling!!”
The black and blonde haired shrine maidens continued arguing as they disappeared into the crowd. They would have stood out in a normal city, but they blended in quite well in a trade show overrun with summoners and vessels.
Kyousuke shrugged as he watched them go, but then he realized the promised time had arrived.
He was here to meet someone.
She was a strange person.
This was May 31, just a few days ago. That was Shiroyama Kyousuke’s first impression of the woman named Himekawa Mika. Her waist-length bluish-black ponytail was contained in a fluffy scrunchie, she had sharp and intelligent facial features, her bodylines had plenty of curves, and she wore a deep navy blue suit with the tight skirt and a portion of the stockings intentionally torn. That last point was the only odd thing about her. Altogether, she was quite beautiful, but there was something else that led the boy to his absurd impression.
Oh.
She looks almost exactly like that woman.
It was 10:30 AM in the crowds of D.R.O.K. And he seriously wondered what to do about her when she blew the silver whistle hanging from her neck the second their eyes met.

“You are Shiroyama Kyousuke-san, right? You’re late. Very late! I believe we agreed to meet at ten on the dot!!”
“Sorry, I’m running a little slow.”
“What kind of excuse is that!? Be more careful…and learn your lesson!!”
Kyousuke held out his hands to urge her to cool down, but Himekawa Mika’s face only grew redder as she blew her whistle. As she did, he heard a jangling from the mug and 12-sided die decorations connected by a thin chain.
In truth, Kyousuke had arrived half an hour before the arranged time and scouted out the surrounding area. He had then waited until half an hour after the arranged time to observe the actions and reactions of the woman. His conversation with the Meinokawa sisters had only been one part of that and he had moved to a position where Himekawa would spot him only after he decided it was safe to let her notice him in the crowd.
The ponytail beauty must have finally felt satisfied because she removed the whistle from her mouth.
“Um, Shiroyama Kyousuke…-kun? What do you know about my situation?”
“Only what was in the job email. You are Himekawa Mika, an Illegal vessel who is currently free. Lu-san introduced us and I was told to ask for any more details once I arrived.”
“That’s the expected format. Let’s find somewhere to sit down and discuss this.”
They were at a trade show for new Summoning Ceremony technology (i.e. weapons), but there were also plenty of lodging facilities and restaurants. Himekawa Mika chose a nearby tent-style restaurant. The long tables arranged in a line had long legs and no chairs. With junk food like frankfurters, fries, and yakisoba on the menu, Kyousuke was cautious, but the tight skirt beauty actually ordered a mug of beer this early.
“It’s ten in the morning.”
“It’s ten thirty. And psychological trances are a necessary part of being a vessel.”
“You’re from Illegal all right. You really know how to excuse your own self-indulgence…”
Then he remembered one of the decorations on the sin necklace she used to mentally bind herself: a mug.
But Kyousuke also saw something nostalgic in her appearance.
“Hm? Why are you staring at me?”
“It’s nothing really.” Kyousuke looked like he had trouble believing it himself. “It’s just that you look a lot like someone. Your general atmosphere, your taste in clothes, and even the whistle. You remind me a lot of *one of the people who looked after me* back in the Queen’s Miniature Garden. … You’re the spitting image of Madam Professor.”
“Please stop hitting on me before we get to work.”

“Even that reaction is just like her, unfortunately. And is that anything to say while drinking a beer? Although that too is just like her, so I’m not sure what to do about it.”
Kyousuke leaned his upper body against the tall table while giving in to the odd sense of déjà vu, but Himekawa Mika placed her shapely butt on the table to sit down with mug in hand. And this beautiful woman had intentionally torn the sides of her tight skirt and her stockings, so when the vessel crossed her long legs, her oddly alluring skin was placed right in front of his eyes.
This only annoyed Kyousuke, but…
“This is a local sign. It warns people away because I’ll only bring them trouble.”
“Illegal really does like *that kind of thing*, don’t they? And no one seems to know where they come from like a prison communication method using the sound of banging on the bars.”
D.R.O.K. had not been running for long, but these local rules had apparently been created, refined, and spread in that short time. It made little sense to someone looking in from the outside.
But Himekawa did not seem to mind.
“What about you? What’s with that combination?”
“What? It’s just caramel popcorn and milk.”
“…It’s ten in the morning.”
“It’s ten thirty. A summoner needs sugar to keep up his high level thoughts.”
“I see you’ve refined your excuses to a high level too.”
“I would have preferred to get some carbs with plain cereal, but this combination was the closest substitute I could find.”
They seemed to have differing tastes.
While showing off her bright and soft skin through her torn stockings, Himekawa gulped down her alcohol and continued the conversation with a drunken energy.
She talked about the rush of new Summoning Ceremonies, Pandemonium, the joint project between the three major powers, and the Deltaston family of the Round Table that was involved in it all.
“So to sum up,” said Kyousuke as he stuck his spoon into the soup bowl of sweet milk. “How Pandemonium works doesn’t matter. The same goes for the Deltaston family’s conspiracy. All that matters are the 353 vessels imprisoned in that impregnable mobile fortress and that Pandemonium uses them as its gears. So is my job to rescue them?”
Himekawa winced somewhat at the ominous atmosphere that seemed charged with static electricity.
“You’re willing to write that family off as not mattering?”
“Well, they don’t matter compared to human lives, do they?”
Once he said that, Kyousuke’s expression was back to normal.
And he thought about what was to come.

If it came to a battle, it would be against other summoners.
Just glancing around the junk food restaurant, he spotted a few summoners and vessels he recognized.
One was Government Award 892, Love and Hate Aggressor.
She was generally a summoner whose motto was loyalty, but she focused less on actual battles and more on working hard to strictly train up newcomers. She had given Government a much greater fighting force and she was also known to appear on the front line and briefly produce hell on earth only when one of her beloved pupils was killed. But she was also well known to cross the boundaries between major powers to repay anyone who saved one of those beloved pupils.
One was Illegal Award 500, Cursed Doll.
She was a rare example of a summoner who had once been a vessel. Most of those with the traits of a spiritual medium could not act as a summoner because they were too strongly influenced by the Material during battle, but she was known for building that loss of control into her strategy and pulling off feats above her Award level with almost suicidal techniques. Once she lost control, no one could predict who she would bare her fangs against, so it was effectively impossible to work with her on a mission.
One was Freedom Award Unknown, Gozaru Summoner.
This bizarre summoner always wore a Gozaru Samurai costume. He was known for being quite skilled but extremely capricious. It was rumored that multiple people took turns wearing the costume. His Award level was unknown because adding up all of his past exploits within all three major powers provided a sum that exceeded 1000.
The situation might allow them to split their opponents between two camps so they would fight each other.
As Kyousuke thought, Himekawa waved a hand to call the waitress over.
Her mug was already empty.
“It’s ten thirty.”
“Then I won’t get another mug. I’ll take a glass of this platinum bubble. And make it snappy☆”
Kyousuke could only hold his head in his hands.
Meanwhile, Himekawa spoke to him from the table.
“The vessels are of course the center of Pandemonium, so it will cease to function if they are removed. The Deltaston family will never allow that. They have people in all three major powers, so we’ll find more and more people involved in this.”
“*That doesn’t matter,*” readily stated Shiroyama Kyousuke.
He was not simply refusing to think about it. If necessary, he would calmly take on all three major powers.
Himekawa gave into her intoxication, swayed back and forth on the table, and used the hand not holding her beer glass to reach behind her waist. She unhooked the side of her skirt, moved to the back of the tight skirt, grabbed the upper edge with her slender finger, and lowered it slightly.

A bit above her tailbone, a large object was embedded in her lightly flushed skin.
It was a blatantly mechanical keyhole with a metallic shine. Something was written in the alphabet along the round outer edge. The six letters starting with “F” provided the name of a goddess from Norse Mythology who was a goddess of beauty and fertility and who controlled half of heaven’s army.
“We are the Holy Key Women. Simply insert and turn the authorization key and we can summon a specific Divine-class. …I rejoiced when I first heard that explanation, but I never thought we would be built into Pandemonium.”
She gave a self-deprecating smile. “But not only is our opponent borrowing the power of Pandemonium, but technology like this is within their reach. In fact, the Deltaston family has spread their roots to all three major powers, so they will have plenty of strange methods beyond the Illegal ones. That is what it means to challenge Pandemonium and fight its owner. Are you truly prepared to take on *a world one step outside the Blood-Sign method*?”
“I already told you: That doesn’t matter.” Kyousuke did not smile. “You might be worried how we’ll fight whatever our enemy might use against us, but you can leave all of that to me. So Himekawa Mika, there’s only one thing I want from you. And I’m not talking about the reward or what cards you might have on hand. First of all, I want to confirm something. I want to hear it from your own mouth.”
“My mouth…?”
“I didn’t hear it in the email. I was told to discuss the details once I arrived. So I’ll ask again: What is it you want? Does the desire in your heart contain the words needed to drive me to action?”
When she heard that, the beautiful woman laughed quietly.
She removed her finger from her lowered tight skirt and hid the strange gadget. She drank down the rest of her beer glass’s contents, inhaled, and exhaled. She seemed to be savoring that normal action.
And then she spoke.

“I came here by forging my license. I can move freely for the time being, but they will notice before long and Illegal…no, the Deltaston family will send someone after me.”
“…?”
“Most of the Holy Key Women are being used as components for Pandemonium, but a few were let out for demonstrations at the booths and studios. I forged my selection for one of those. I might have been able to bring a few more with me. That might have been an option, but I abandoned the idea. Instead of only partially saving them, I temporarily abandoned them all so I could rescue every last one of them.”
That may have been why.
She had chosen to stick with Illegal’s way of doing things. She did not bother with niceties, she did not compromise and then glorify the tragic result, and she was prepared to stay true to her initial intent until the very, very end. Had she taken a turn toward the unkind in order to reach a result that surpassed good and evil?
“I can’t just escape on my own. I can’t let this end as a mere traitor. I used the internet to contact an intermediary I used to use and I used the thin thread of Lu Niang Lan to draw in you, Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit. I threw out all morals in order to say this one thing.”
She looked Kyousuke straight in the eye.
And with the fragility of trying to support the weight of every last sinner with a single strand of spider web, Himekawa Mika spoke clearly.
Just like the Holy Key Women, she seemed to directly insert her words into a certain boy’s soul and then twist it around.
“So I beg you. Please save us all from the impregnable Pandemonium.”

Part 4

(Timeline “Now”)
On the viewing platform, Kyousuke slapped his cheek with one hand while the White Queen leaned up against him.
(Little by little, it’s coming back to me.)
Himekawa Mika was one of the Holy Key Women. She had contacted Kyousuke to rescue the 353 vessels remaining in the multi-tentacle mobile fortress Pandemonium, a colossal Repliglass structure. She was the current Alice. She was the unique vessel who could skip three stages in the Blood-Sign method to immediately summon a specific Divine-class into her body.

(In that case, was she a Holy Key Woman who can directly summon the White Queen? No, that doesn't make sense. Her keyhole had the six-letter name of a Norse goddess starting with F. Since this isn't fitting together, I must still be *missing some memories*…)
"Oh? Is something the matter, brother?"
He observed the White Queen as she embraced him and looked up at him, but he saw no resemblance to Himekawa Mika. He could not sense that woman's presence.
Was Himekawa Mika imprisoned within the Queen, or was there some other possibility?
"Something's bothering me."
"What might that be?"
"What happened with Pandemonium? No, what happened with the Holy Key Women? And not just the ones imprisoned inside that fortress. What happened to them all, including Himekawa Mika!?"
He was missing some memories and someone who should have been by his side was missing.
He felt a pressure in his chest that was not just from confronting the White Queen.
This may have been what it felt like to get hopelessly drunk and wake up in a pile of trash in an unfamiliar alleyway while holding a bloody wallet in your hand.
Meanwhile, the peak of the Unexplored-class with her silver twintails and pure white dress brought her slender index finger to her own lips.
She did not explain anything.
Only a thin smile appeared on her lips.
"…Hee hee☆"
Kyousuke could not wait any longer.
She would not budge if he shoved her away. He slipped out of her arms as she leaned against his chest and he immediately climbed over the viewing platform railing. The platform was four stories up. He jumped between the steel beams complexly crisscrossing as they supported the platform and slid down the diagonally positioned beams to control the speed of his descent.
As soon as he landed, the White Queen descended from heaven.
She weightlessly landed on the ground.
"Okay, brother. Where should we go next?"
"Shut up! I'm not relying on you anymore and I've found something I need to see for myself!! I don't know what happened after that, but I need to see if I can still answer Himekawa Mika's request. No, no matter what might have happened, I'll find a way, even if it means altering the timeline or overcoming causality!!"
He needed information.
But was facing inwards and filling in his missing memories really the only way to get that?

In the few pieces he had recovered, he had seen references to the Deltaston family that had infiltrated all three major powers. And he could also directly attack Pandemonium to discover what had become of the vessels. One was a powerful enemy and the other an impregnable mobile fortress. So what? He was Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit. He had no vessel and could not use the Summoning Ceremony. What did that matter? If he wanted to be known as the strongest, he had to accept some slight inconveniences. None of that was any reason to just sit idly by and watch.
After all, he had already heard it.
He had heard the cursed words that someone had risked everything to say. He wanted to know what had happened to the vessels imprisoned within Pandemonium.
Not to mention Himekawa Mika. He definitely wanted to confirm the safety of that woman who looked so much like that Madam Professor who had looked after him back in the Queen's Miniature Garden.
"Brother, your adorable emotions don't matter here. Do you have an actual plan?"
"Kh. The Deltaston family has spread their power far enough that it would be difficult to acquire an accurate list of its members on short notice. That means Pandemonium is the obvious answer. I need to head there and check inside!"
"What a pain. That's not much of a plan, you know? That is an impregnable multi-tentacle mobile fortress. Not only can you not break open the thick Repliglass entrance, but you will likely have trouble simply crossing the vast field to reach it. I hear they have microwave anti-personnel radars and infrared searchlights."
"There's a way! *It was obvious enough from the viewing platform!* I'm pretty sure I already tricked a Government bomber into firing on Pandemonium!!"
What he needed was rather specialized, but that would not be a problem at D.R.O.K. where weapons were treated as a business. After making the necessary "arrangements", Kyousuke and the White Queen set off toward Pandemonium.
But not everything went quite so well.
It happened when they had arrived quite close.
He had stood out too much with the White Queen accompanying him. And it was possible the Deltaston family that controlled Pandemonium was already monitoring him due to something in his missing memories.
So he should have assumed someone might try to stop him once he took action.
"Hi."
He heard footsteps.
They were right in front of black Pandemonium's main entrance in the empty field at the center of the donut-shaped trade show.
Two people blocked the way as if this had been planned.

One was a tall and muscular man of about 18. His black hair was set in an impressive pompadour and he wore a baggy T-shirt that reached below his hips, shorts, and oddly expensive basketball shoes. He loudly chewed bubblegum while resting a long stick made of ski material on his shoulder. That was his Blood-Sign. The bottom end was strangely swollen and metallic, but that seemed to be a stabilizer for the center of gravity. Needless to say, only a summoner would use that.
The other was a short glasses girl of about 12. She had shoulder-length wavy blonde hair and brown skin, but those colors were likely artificial rather than natural. Tan lines from a one piece swimsuit were clearly visible on her skin. She wore a sleeved cape that split into feather-like shapes at the bottom, an orange camisole, black leather hot pants to cover her small butt, an ultra-miniskirt with a jagged bottom, and boots. Her extra-large witch's hat was a Halloween-like orange and black and had an eagle feather stuck in it. Something jangled at her neck, but it was not a necklace. A wooden ring about the size of a coffee cup saucer had several threads passing through the inside to create a pattern resembling a spider web or a rose. It was a dream catcher, an accessory made by Native Americans. She held a giant axe. Its apparent size was increased due to her short height, but it may have been another of their symbols. She was likely the vessel. The gaudy outfit on such a slender and undeveloped body may have been the "bondage" that controlled her mind. The specific vessel restraints seemed to be the piercings. Kyousuke could see the ones on her ears and navel, but it was possible she had more where he could not see.
"I suppose you wouldn't know why we're here, would you?"
Kyousuke felt something odd in the back of his mind.
The tingling feeling came from the scab over his memories.
"I know…"
He had no vessel and could not use the Summoning Ceremony. Nevertheless, he pulled his Repliglass Blood-Sign from his back and half-groaned his response.
"I know who you are...!!"

Part 5

(Timeline "Past")
After acquiring an accurate diagram of Pandemonium, Shiroyama Kyousuke and Himekawa Mika waited until the night wore on before beginning their actual attack.

The field was thoroughly scanned by microwave anti-personnel radars and invisible infrared searchlights. A vast space with no cover had been transformed into a thick barrier.
After crossing it using “a certain method”, they saw something there.
Two people stood in front of Pandemonium’s massive and thick metal door.
The summoner had a pompadour and wore a baggy T-shirt and shorts.
The short vessel in glasses had bright swimsuit tan lines, an eagle father in her Halloween witch’s hat, a unique sleeved cape, an orange camisole, black hot pants, an ultra-miniskirt, a decoration around her neck, a giant decorative armor-breaking axe, and piercings across her body to bind her.
Kyousuke asked a question of that pair after pulling his Blood-Sign from his back.
“Are you pawns of Pandemonium…no, of the Deltaston family that has infiltrated all three major powers?”
“Maybe.”
The summoner grinned and raised his Blood-Sign which was made of ski material.
That signaled the beginning of the Summoning Ceremony, a battle between the gods using Materials.
“But first you can call us Government Award 501, Perfect Game!!”

Facts

- While a vessel has summoned a Material, the summoner cannot break the contract with that vessel.
- The Summoning Ceremony trade show named D.R.O.K. and the joint project of Pandemonium were made into an event controlled by the Deltaston family after the three major powers were manipulated into a standstill.
- Himekawa looks a lot like the woman who looked after Kyousuke when he was young.
- As a Holy Key Woman, Himekawa can immediately summon a specific Divine-class, but that does not match the conditions needed for the White Queen.
- Kyousuke had already heard the cursed words from Himekawa.
- The exact affiliation and intentions of the enemy summoner, Perfect Game, are not known. But Kyousuke seems to understand some of it from his missing memories.

- All that aside, the White Queen wants to go to a tropical island. She really, really wants to.

Stage 02: There Will Certainly Be Consequences

「いや、そっちの方がやりやすいか。秘密の恋人同士って設定なら――」

「ひっ、ひっ、ひみつのこいびとーっっっ!!!???」

(『Now』Stage02 Open 06/03 10:10)
(『Past』Stage02 Open 06/02 22:10)

ステージ02

やっぱりただで済むはずがない

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“No, wait. This might actually be better. If it looks like we’re secret lovers…”
“S-s-s-secret lovers!!!???”
(“Now” Stage 02 Open 06/03 10:10)
(“Past” Stage 02 Open 06/02 22:10)
There Will Certainly Be Consequences

Part 1

(Timeline “Past”)
It was just past ten at night on June 2. As always, the darkness of D.R.O.K.’s night was swept away by the bright lights of the stages, but the remaining shadows functioned as useful blind spots.
Shiroyama Kyousuke and Himekawa Mika were moving through one of those blind spots.
However, walking directly to Pandemonium would have been difficult.
With microwave anti-personnel radars and invisible infrared searchlights, the 5km radius field at the center of the donut-shaped trade show became a thick barrier with no blind spots.
Normally, anyway.
“Good thing this is a weapons trade show. There were plenty of oxygen tanks lying around.”
Kyousuke set a few heavy objects down on the grass.
He had bought the night vision binoculars at a business booth.
“Good, good. The six craters from yesterday’s aerial bombing are nice and connected. That gives us a direct line to Pandemonium five kilometers away.”
“I’m sure it’s better than the perfectly flat field, but is that really enough to hide us from the anti-personnel radar? Especially when they’ll have increased security?”
“*Isn’t that why we dug up the underground water veins* and waited more than half a day for the craters to flood?” Kyousuke answered her with a bitter smile. “The microwaves the radar uses are weak against water. Most of them will be reflected off the water’s surface and what does make it through will be severely weakened. It isn’t a good method for searching through water.”
“What about the infrared searchlights?”

“Do I even have to say it? Whether visible or invisible, light acts the same. Once it contacts the water’s surface, it will reflect or refract, so they won’t be able to pull off a proper search.”
They would have been found immediately on the surface, so their general plan was to approach through the dark water. That was the reason for the oxygen tanks.
But…
“…I do have one question.”
“Wh-what is it?”
As Himekawa stuffed her clothes and brand-name shoulder bag inside a waterproof bag, a dry cracking sound came from her hand and she pulled it back.
“Oops, I need to be more careful. …I scraped my index fingernail on the metal zipper. Where’s the repair solution? The manicure quick-drying repair solution?”
“That doesn’t matter.”

Kyousuke ignored the chemical she used to hide the scrape on her nail in just as few seconds like it was instant glue.
He was not going to let her avoid explaining herself here.
“I told you to obtain a diving outfit, didn’t I? I let you handle it on your own so you could keep your privacy about your measurements and such…but why are you wearing a racing swimsuit? We’re still more than a month away from the pools opening.”
“Eh? B-but! I couldn’t think of a more functional swimsuit… I-it’s not like I chose a bikini or something! I’m not just messing around!!”
She could not bear to have him stare at her with his blank expression, so she started covering different parts of her body with her hands, twisting around, running her fingers down the white accent line, and reaching down to fix the navy blue swimsuit where it was riding up in her butt.
“…”
Incidentally, Kyousuke was wearing a diving wetsuit that covered him from neck to toe. It was meant for special operations rather than leisure, so when he compared her swimsuit to him, he wanted to mock and curse her. In fact, it would have been harder to find a skintight racing swimsuit at the weapons trade show, but her efforts had been entirely misguided.
“And the scrunchie. You don’t want that getting soaked, do you?”
“Uuh…”
He felt nothing but worry as the vessel pouted her lips, reached behind her head, and redid her hair with a rubber hairband while needlessly pushing out her shapely breasts.
That bad feeling grew when she put the oxygen tank on her back.
“Hyah!”
He heard a strange shout and then Himekawa nearly fell backwards. He quickly supported her from behind and she started flailing her slender limbs. She was acting like a new part-timer wearing a full-body mascot costume for the first time. It would have been a normal sight back in Toy Dream 35, but it was a problem here.
“Please don’t tell me…”
“Wh-what is it, Kyousuke-kun?”
“This doesn’t mean you don’t know how to keep your balance in the water, does it?”
“U-um, well, I might be able to manage if I have a float or a kickboard.”
Kyousuke covered his face with his hands. This was a diving mission and he was only discovering this now. And since she was not even certain in her ability with a float, most likely…
“Can you not swim?”
“I-I can too! Or at least float. I can float! You shouldn’t give adults that pitying look! I can even do the flutter kick and bring my head up to breathe! Well, if the instructor is holding my hands…”
“Or are you just entirely useless?”
“Don’t call an adult that!!”

When he saw Himekawa mindlessly reach down toward the whistle attached to her sin necklace, Kyousuke covered her mouth with all his might. *She's worse than useless!!* he concluded in his heart.
It looked like taking care of her was his only option.
Specifically, he had to pass his arms below hers to essentially embrace her as they swam together.
"This is kind of embarrassing. This swimsuit leaves my back pretty bare…"
"Don't worry. I can only feel the metal oxygen tank."
"Perhaps I should thank you for not asking to do this from the front."
"That's a good way to have the other person grab onto you so you both drown."
With that, he began his dive through the crater lakes while carrying his heavy burden. It was a surprisingly long swim. The unchanging scenery of the dark manmade lakes made it seem all the longer. On the way, Himekawa Mika squirmed inside her skintight navy blue racing swimsuit, but Kyousuke restrained her and maintained a set pace.
The craters differed in size, but they were ten meters at the deepest. They could not take the most direct route to Pandemonium, so their path zigzagged between the center points of the complexly overlapping circles. The distance they traveled was greater than five kilometers and they had to be very careful so they did not forget which direction to go at each turning point.
(I'm sure it's partially due to using underground water veins, but the water is pretty cold. I can't force her through too much more of this.)
He could pick up his speed to be considerate, but rushing this would only hurt them.
If they ended up swimming in circles, she really could die.
He maintained that form of callousness and they finally arrived at their destination.
"Puhah."
Kyousuke stuck his head up from the edge of the crater and removed the oxygen tank's mouthpiece. They were near the tentacle-like propulsion device of the colossal Repliglass mobile fortress.
He let Himekawa Mika climb up first, but since she seemed to be having trouble doing so under the power of her own arms, he pushed up on her butt and thighs to force her up. He then climbed up after her, but she wrapped her arms around him before he could remove the oxygen tank on his back.
"Ah, ahh, so cold…chatter, chatter, chatter, chatter."
"Didn't I tell you? Your lips are blue. C'mon, there are towels in that waterproof bag, right? Using that would be more constructive."
A guy and a girl warming each other with their skin in a snowy mountain was not all that effective in reality. Wiping off the moisture with one towel and then rubbing yourself with another towel for the frictional heat was

more immediately effective. She was older than him, but he felt like he was dealing with a child.
(Another way that she's *a lot like that woman*…)
Himekawa Mika simply let him do what he wished as she lay sprawled out on the ground in her racing swimsuit. Not that he *wanted* her to scream sexual harassment and blast her whistle when he was trying to help her.
After confirming she had recovered to a certain extent, Kyousuke shoved a waterproof bag into her arms.
"C'mon, hurry up and change before the heat escapes. You'll be better off in your usual suit."
"Ah, ahhh…"
"Please don't tell me you need help with that too."
Kyousuke immediately turned his back, pulled his hoodie and track pants from his own waterproof bag, and began to change. The wetsuit and oxygen tank would be a needless burden, so he did not want to carry them around. He hooked the bag's string on a part of the crater's edge and let the bag itself sink into the water.
He turned back around to find Himekawa had only just finished putting on her underwear. She must not have been thinking straight because she next started swapping out the rubber hairband for her scrunchie.
"Hurry up! Am I going to have to help you out after all!?"
"Heh…eh heh heh… Apparently I'm really a poikilotherm…"
She must not have had the energy to scream, "Kyah! Pervert!", so she clearly needed to be wound back up as a human being. Her weak smile was so pitiful that Kyousuke did end up helping her into her clothes. This time he really was treating her like a child.
And then it was finally time to face their present goal.
Pandemonium.
That giant black mobile fortress measured more than 800 meters
The entrance was blocked by a thick Repliglass door much like one found at a bank vault.
Himekawa Mika seemed to have recovered somewhat because she intentionally tore her new stockings and then tapped on the back of her hips near her tailbone.
"Shall I break it open?"
"No, even if it was weakened quite a bit by the ridiculous method they used, this armor still survived an explosion from the Unexplored-class Lady of Purple Lightning. Hm, more than the material being solid, they've applied a special treatment to the surface. Just like magic circles guide the power according to a set of rules, I think the pattern here redirects the paranormal burden and dilutes it into the planet. And it's also grounded against curses. Now, can we really take that on directly with a Divine-class?"
"Then…?"
"According to the information we acquired, the entrance uses multiple biometrics such as fingerprint, pulse, and iris. I don't know the exact

process, but it would probably be fastest to find someone involved in all this. And fortunately, *anyone who loses in the Summoning Ceremony enters a mindless state and can be guided like a zombie. We might just be able to draw out the information we need.*"
With that, Kyousuke glanced to the side.
Himekawa did the same and finally noticed something.
A man and a girl slowly walked out from behind one of the tentacles supporting the fortress.
"Are you pawns of Pandemonium…no, of the Deltaston family that has infiltrated all three major powers?"
"Maybe," answered the pompadour man.
He wore a baggy T-shirt and pants and he held a Blood-Sign made from ski material with a swollen metallic part on the bottom end.
"But first you can call us Government Award 501, Perfect Game!!"
Kyousuke pulled his Repliglass Blood-Sign from his back while also sticking a hand in his pocket and grabbing a weighty object the size of a coffee can.
It was an Incense Grenade.
No matter which major power his opponent belonged to or how many Awards they had, he would go all out to crush them.
"Mika, let's defeat them as quickly as we can. They were nice enough to bring us the fingerprint and iris we needed."
"That's Mika-*san*, you damn kid!"
Kyousuke ignored his vessel's unfair comment, pulled the pin, and dropped the metal can at his feet. In the five seconds before it detonated, he finished observing the surrounding space and came up with around 45 different ways of finishing within 30 seconds no matter where the 36 Spots appeared.
But…
He heard the sound of shattering glass.
Only 0.4 seconds after Kyousuke's Artificial Sacred Ground appeared, that field was smashed to pieces.
"What…?"
There were no White Thorns, Petals, Rose, or Spots. And Kyousuke himself froze in place for a moment with his Blood-Sign raised.
A roaring wind slipped through that gap. The summoner known as Perfect Game approached from straight head. At some point, he had changed how he held his weapon. He held what had been the upper end and he used the metallic stabilizer as a weight. He spun his body like a tornado and the Blood-Sign made of glass fiber bent like a fishing rod. The blunt weapon had built up power like a spring and it approached like a morning star.
This called for a change of plans.
Kyousuke adjusted his grip to hold his Repliglass Blood-Sign like a staff and blocked the blow that would have landed on the side of his head.
The two summoners who used even the gods as stepping stones glared at each other from a distance of only a few dozen centimeters.
The mass of athletic muscle smiled fiercely.

“Did you think a Government 500-level would be an easy win?”
“…”
“You probably wouldn’t understand, Mr. All-Powerful Freedom 900-Level. It’s not that I know why I’m bound to win this. I’m carrying the great weight of knowing why I can’t afford to lose.”
A strange feeling ran down Kyousuke’s spine.
He obeyed that danger signal and focused on something in the corner of his vision: Perfect Game’s vessel. The small glasses girl had blonde hair and brown skin and she wore a black and orange Halloween witch’s hat, a sleeved cape, a bright orange camisole, and a combination of black hot pants and an ultra-miniskirt with a jagged bottom to cover her butt. She was not hiding behind anything or covering her face. She had been standing right in front of him from the beginning, so why had it taken until just now to recognize that girl with swimsuit tan lines?
“Incense Expert Ellie Slide!! Did you screw with my perception!?”
The girl grinned. It was a mocking grin.
She stuck out her tongue and a piercing wetly glittered upon it.
The Incense Grenades that set up an Artificial Sacred Ground differed between summoners and they were private information on the same level as fingerprints and irises. That made them impossible to mass-produce, so the summoner either had to mix their own or hire a specialist. Ellie Slide was one such specialist. At her level, she could probably use the composition of a personal Incense Grenade to mix up some incense that would negate it.
Ellie Slide dragged around an armor-breaking axe that beat down its enemies with its weight.
A closer look showed the axe’s handle was shaped like a smoking pipe and several small bottles were inserted into the back of the one-sided axe blade. It was likely made to efficiently spray out an incense vapor created with the same process as an electronic cigarette. And an axe that doubled as a pipe was an important ritual tool used when Native Americans tribes made decisions.
She controlled it with the flute-like keys on the silver handle and the trigger released a spray. The chocolate witch with the alluring swimsuit tan lines spoke while releasing a sweet aroma.
“Surely you know who I am and what I do, Alice’s Guide. Personal views of good and evil and the benefit or detriment to any major power will not stop me. I simply find a summoner I believe can reach Award 1000 and bind a contract with them. If they do not live up to my expectations, I simply discard them.”
Also, incense itself was burned during Western magical rituals to separate the area from the world and help the user enter a trance. An expert like her would be able to alter someone’s mind enough to *erase the name of the person standing right in front of them.*
Her fingers raced along the handle.

The caps of the small bottles inserted into the back of the blade were pushed in like cylinders and the liquid inside shined wetly.
“And you remember my own nickname, don’t you? Amplifier 500. …I am known in this field as a vessel who can increase the upper limits of my summoner by about 500 Awards. Now, a question. When Max Layard here introduced himself, *what Award level did he say he was*?”
“You heard her.” Max grinned. “Everyone has a reason they can’t afford to lose. Don’t just assume you’ve got a monopoly on that, Alice (with) Rabbit!!”
To avoid being pushed back by brute force, Kyousuke fell back himself.
Pompadour Max did not bother pursuing.
No…
“But I’ll do whatever it takes to win! That’s why I’m known as Perfect Game!! Even a Freedom 900-level will be blown to bits if he’s hit by an Unexplored-class’s power without a protective circle. Here’s a taste of what D.R.O.K. has to offer!!!!!”
There was no sound.
There was only light. Kyousuke first glanced at the pattern racing across his body and then he looked across the entire dark field. He saw a magic circle several hundred meters across and a stealth bomber flew by while blending into the dark sky.
Himekawa Mika looked up in her tight skirt and then grew pale.
“A Government summon bombing!? In the demonstration, they summoned the Lady of Purple Lightning without a vessel so its power would sweep across a fixed area!!”
It was unclear how Max and Ellie of Perfect Game intended to escape the dome-shaped blast formed from raw power not filtered through a vessel’s body, but if the bombing was triggered now, Kyousuke and Himekawa would be hit by the destructive power of an unexplored-class.
“Mika.”
“That’s Mika-*san*! And…kyah!?”
There was no countdown.
The attack arrived immediately.
The purple flash of light created a new crater 300 meters across.
“————!!”
Max Layard and Ellie Slide had created this situation, but it had been risky for them as well. Once before, Pandemonium had been accidentally hit by the bomber and survived. That massive structure resembled a giant coffin or a giant squid. It was possible to survive if they immediately sent the exorcism request to keep the bombing time to a minimum and sheltered behind one of the giant tentacles, but they were still bringing the fury of an Unexplored-class down on top of them without a protective circle. The more one knew about the Summoning Ceremony, the more mind-numbingly terrifying that was.
But Max laughed.
Even if he had to force it.

“Heh… That was an Unexplored-class, the Lady of Purple Lightning. I won’t even bother checking if you’re alive. You might be a legend, but no human body could survive-…”
He was not even given time to finish his sentence.
After a light sound of impact, the pompadour man looked down and saw the tip of a Repliglass Blood-Sign neatly buried in his solar plexus.
“Dah…gabh!?”
Just as he started choking, the tip shot up. Guided by the hands of the boy holding it, it powerfully collided with Max’s chin and knocked his head upwards.
“Bhahah!? Ah, goh! Wha-!?”
Max writhed on the ground, but his confusion was greater than the pain or suffering.
How had Shiroyama Kyousuke avoided utter annihilation?
Given his location, Max doubted the boy could have hidden behind one of Pandemonium’s tentacles. He should have been standing in the very center of the blast.
“Pandemonium didn’t survive the summon bombing because of how hard its armor is. Just like ultra-high temperature plasma, that blast is far beyond anything a wall that thick can handle. The surface was treated with a certain type of magic circle that redirected the Lady of Purple Lightings power into the earth like an electrical ground.”
Kyousuke spun his Blood-Sign around and rested it on his shoulder.
“I understood the theory and I had the perfect reference material right in front of my eyes. All I had to do was analyze it and make it my own. Scraping out the shape on the ground with my foot was enough. …Of course, this only worked because the summon bombing technique is so wasteful that the blast is weakened a fair bit. If that had been properly summoned with the Blood-Sign method, not even a trace of us would remain.”
“…”
That was not as simple as he made it sound.
In fact, was it even possible for a human mind and limbs to pull it off? It was a lot like taking the pattern printed on a silicon wafer and reproducing the circuit by hand in the hopes of building the same processor.
It was impossible. It just could not be done.
This was not an issue of skill as a summoner. He lacked the necessary tools. No scientist could research a pathogen without a microscope.
No doctor could save a patient without surgical tools.
Kyousuke was essentially saying he had seen the pathogen with the naked eye and opened the patient’s stomach with his fingers. Even at the 900-level, could someone really do something so inhuman?
There was one way.
There was a filter glass used to read magic circles more detailed than a high-density LSI. It was covered in an identical number of precise grooves

that would interact with the grooves of the circle to draw out a unique pattern visible to the naked eye. There was an invention that stamped a random string of numbers or letters over the name or address of the letter's recipient to hide that personal information, but this was more or less the opposite. Perhaps it was like taking a barcode that was not normally human readable and processing it so the information could be read with the naked eye.
But fewer than 20 filter glasses were said to exist in all of Government and they cost far more than the average electron microscope. They were a complex combination of lenses, prisms, and mirrors made from a great quantity of glass, crystal, and jewels, so the materials alone took up more space than a school building. If the design was stretched out to the point that it could be read with the naked eye, it was said it would make a full circuit of the earth.
So this had to be a bluff.
Max Layard forced himself to assume that, but…
"Ah."
Something fluttered in the wind.
It looked like a thin translucent film.
And Kyousuke held a hand mirror he had likely taken from his female vessel.
"Ahh."
For old gramophones, the waveforms of voices were recorded by touching a needle against a disk covered in a thin layer of wax.
And the glass in a hand mirror would vibrate when someone spoke.
If he covered the hand mirror with a quick-drying manicure repair solution that acted much like instant glue and then spoke right into it, the amplitude might be carved into that thin film.
If Shiroyama Kyousuke had fully memorized a filter glass's designs, which would be more detailed than a silicon wafer…
And if he could use the amplitude of his voice to perfectly output those designs…
Then…
What if he peeled the repair solution from the mirror and held it in front of his eyes like sunglasses?
"Ahhhhhhh!! You're kidding…you've got to be kidding! That's not possible! Are you saying you used your voice…just your voice against the mirror coated with repair solution to create an analysis filter glass!? But those are supposed to cost more than your average electron microscope!!"
It was sometimes said that a skilled craftsman's fingers could surpass the limits of factory machinery.
But could he believe that now that he had seen it for himself?
Could he believe that this boy had used his voice to easily draw out a geometric pattern so complex that even Government had only been able to create 20 of them?

Kyousuke spat out his response.
“Compared to that Queen’s productivity, this is child’s play.”
They simply lived in different worlds. The enemy they were prepared to fight was entirely different.
And it went beyond that.
Even if he had finished the analysis with that superhuman finesse, when had he put together his own theory?
Where had he actually drawn it out?
Altogether, hadn’t he had less than 10 seconds to work with? In that miniscule amount of time, he had caught up to the theoretical defense system of Pandemonium’s armor which had taken who knows how many hours to design and cost who knows how much money to build. How advanced was his mind, his hands, and every last part of him?
“Th-th-th-…!! Th-th-th-that-th-th-that’s not a very nice joke, dammit!!”
“Can you explain which part of this you think is worth laughing about?”
With that cold comment, Kyousuke pulled the pin from an Incense Grenade and tossed it away. Before Max could prepare his Blood-Sign again, he looked over at his partner Ellie Slide who was still sitting on the ground.
Instead of telling her it was time to fight, it was clearly a negative act of confirming that she could use her interfering incense to avoid the fight.
And the incense expert and vessel girl only sighed quietly.
Kyousuke gave the answer for her.
“Do you really think Ellie’s incense is still floating around after that blast?”
“Kh.”
“…It might be time to find a new summoner.”
Even his own vessel gave an exasperated comment as she calmly pulled a new small bottle from her belt.
A moment later, the Artificial Sacred Ground expanded and Alice (with) Rabbit’s Blood-Sign gave a roar.

Part 2

(Timeline “Past”)
Defeating an opponent was simple when they had lost both their will to fight and their nerve.
In fact, it may not even qualify as a fight at that point.
“…”
After receiving the shock of seeing the god he worshiped slaughtered before his eyes, Max slowly wandered around like a zombie. As Kyousuke guided

him with the tip of his Blood-Sign, the man unsteadily approached the side of Pandemonium's thick entrance door and pulled out an authorization pad hidden there. After he released several locks, Kyousuke and Himekawa slipped inside.
"We're inside now, but they had to have noticed that. An order was sent to the bomber and we fought inside an Artificial Sacred Ground. This clearly doesn't qualify as covert anymore!!"
"That just means we need to change our plans. Either way, I never thought we could settle all of this in secret. It was only a matter of time."
After all, the Repliglass structure was more than 800 meters across and even more if the "tentacles" were included. Two nuclear aircraft carriers would fit inside end to end, but unlike a ship, no thought had been given to a low center of gravity, fuel efficiency, or wave-making resistance. Its width and height had been expanded so much that it had become an unimaginably vast space.
Ships and airplanes tended to eliminate any unneeded volume, but Pandemonium seemed to be an exception. The corridors were needlessly wide and the rooms were all large. It was apparently a giant Box capable of supporting almost all of the bizarre summoning techniques demonstrated at D.R.O.K., so it had to be a largescale system.
And thus it had plenty of hiding places, so Kyousuke and Himekawa were not easily found even with search teams from Government, Illegal, and Freedom running around.
"Now that we're inside, the rest is easy. We just have to get to the other side of the door leading to the central processor core where the 353 vessels are."
"But how? You saw the diagram. Pandemonium's sections are restricted at different levels, so moving between them won't be easy. Plus, they're on full alert and there are summoners everywhere. How are we supposed to travel safely through the facility now!?"
"That's what makes it so easy." Kyousuke pulled out the metal can of an Incense Grenade. "With that many summoners around, we just have to keep a Chain going while we safely break into the depths of the facility inside the protective circle. The greater the density of summoners, the easier it is to keep that Chain going. There are doors in the way? There are traps? Don't you think we can break through all of that by summoning a high cost Material?"
Himekawa was overwhelmed by how simple he made it sound.
He was assuming he could defeat every last enemy even if there was 100 or 1000 of them, and even if that included anything from a Government Award 100 to a Freedom Award 900. But he was not being irrational or giving into wishful thinking. He had simply chosen that card as the optimal plan.
And then something like lightning dropped toward Himekawa Mika's head. The loud boom only sounded after a short delay.

Himekawa flinched back a half tempo later, but she was unharmed. The Blood-Sign made of ski material with a metal stabilizer had been blocked by Kyousuke's Repliglass Blood-Sign.
It was a large man with a familiar black pompadour.
It was the summoner who should have been in a mindless state after being defeated with the Blood-Sign method.
But Max Layard showed no sign of that loss.
He made full use of his logic and intelligence for the very human purposes of winning through trickery.
"Another form of cheating with Ellie Slide's incense, huh? I guess I should have expected that from an expert at strengthening summoners. How convenient is she!?"
As Kyousuke cursed, Max pulled a pineapple-shaped Incense Grenade from his pocket and threw it. Kyousuke could not immediately react after losing his balance protecting Himekawa, so he could only watch.
Wherever Ellie Slide was hiding, she was drawn in as the vessel when it detonated.
This time, Perfect Game had begun the battle.
And by the time Kyousuke had raised his Blood-Sign, some other summoners butted in from hiding. They sacrificed their White Thorns to enter someone else's Artificial Sacred Ground even if it put them at a disadvantage.
Government Award 501, Perfect Game.
Illegal Award 808, Lionheart.
Freedom Award 897, Harem Collector 98.
Kyousuke smiled thinly as he viewed them as three coordinated enemies instead of individual summoners.
"I see."
"I don't want you complaining this isn't fair. There's no rule saying summoner battles have to be one-on-one, and none of us can afford to lose!!"
Perfect Game spat out that response, but Kyousuke actually liked that.
This man was willing to work toward his victory, try out any method available to him, and use his own strength to clear a path through any hierarchy or barrier a third party placed in front of him. This was the very strength of being human.
White Thorns were launched simultaneously from three directions and the boxy three-dimensional Rose shattered. The 216 fist-sized red balls of light known as Petals scattered in every direction.
The Blood-Sign method generally had a rock-paper-scissors structure.

So in a one-against-many situation, the multiple enemies could summon Materials from the high, middle, and low sound ranges to guarantee they had the individual's weakness. It was rock-paper-scissors with no ties, so a group or organization had the upper hand.
However, multiple solid sounds followed.
Kyousuke had launched his White Thorn toward his enemy's White Thorn instead of any of the Petals.
"Wha-!?"
Who was it that shouted that?
That single shot ricocheted again and again as it knocked all three enemy summoners' White Thorns off course. They knocked Petals into Spots, but not the intended ones. The Petals a summoner had acquired could generally be rearranged at will and used whenever they wanted, but the very first Material was a different matter. Or rather, it would be suicide to not immediately use it because their protective circle would not appear, their vessel would remain human, and they would be instantly killed by the very first attack.
All three of them began with the Original Green (k). Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 1.
They were shocked to see identical three meter gelatinous Materials.
Meanwhile, Kyousuke had the Armored Beast (dr – zx). Sound Range: High. Cost: 4. As the name suggested, it was a Regulation-class shaped like a ferocious lion made of golden Western armor.
Kyousuke had the higher cost and the superior sound range.
At this rate, his enemies' superior numbers would barely matter.
He simply had to strike the weaker sound range to mow them all down like grass.
"But it's kind of sad."
Kyousuke spoke just before the clash.
He honestly respected the pompadour man who would accept any cowardly or cheap method because he could not afford to lose.
But he still spoke.
"And yet this is almost adorable compared to my stubborn but futile struggles against the Queen."
Finally, the metal lion roared and mowed everything down with its violent fangs and claws.

Part 3

(Timeline “Now”)
“I suppose you wouldn’t know why we’re here, would you?”
And back to the next day in the present.
Max Layard and Ellie Slide of Perfect Game once more appeared in front of Pandemonium and threw a pineapple-shaped Incense Grenade in front of Shiroyama Kyousuke.
“I know…”
It detonated and an Artificial Sacred Ground appeared.
36 Spots appeared and a three-dimensional Rose made from 216 Petals appeared in the center. The battle between summoners was finally beginning.
“I know who you are…!!”
“Hmmm.”
Except the White Queen’s blank expression ruined it all.
A deafening roar followed.
“Eh? Ah?”
The pompadour man voiced his confusion just as he used all his strength to launch a White Thorn with his Blood-Sign.
The Rose had vanished.
Pure white claw marks had torn into space itself and nothing else remained.
And the White Queen had clearly transformed a portion of her dress.
“Diiinosaurrrr.”
She sounded incredibly bored.
Something like the upper body of a carnivorous dinosaur rose several dozen meters tall and attacked Max from above. Its jaws and fangs filled his vision.
Without a protective circle, this would kill him instantly. No, even with one, this would have chewed him to pieces!!
“Ohhhhhhwah!?”
Max Layard shouted and rolled out of the way, but that was not enough to stop the peak of the Unexplored-class.
He only survived because Kyousuke embraced the twintail girl from the side. Rather than stopping, the White Queen blushed and her aim veered off course. The green earth half a step to Max’s side was mercilessly devoured and the most basic structure of the world itself was torn away into pure whiteness.
“Goddammit! Boss!! To Pandemonium’s tentacle!!”
Panicked, Max reached toward his ear. But rather than an earpiece, an athlete’s webcam was attached there.
Or perhaps it was a unit for transmitting his location and asking for bombing support.
“The Queen might be protecting you, but you’ve got no protective circle. If we hit you with another Unexplored-class’s power…”
A bright light shined down and drew some optical art on the grassy field.
This constructed a magic circle several hundred meters across and

Pandemonium's power was used to summon the Lady of Purple Lightning without a vessel so that her exposed power would expand in an explosion.
But the White Queen was unfazed.
In fact, it was difficult to imagine ever seeing her fazed.
"Gah."
Another portion of her dress transformed.
The elegantly decorative cloth made a rod shape. She held it like a baseball bat and swung it like a clever girl who chose to visit a batting cage on a date and made a show of her poor skills to get the boy to give her a hands-on lesson.
"Claaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaang! goes the bat."
Something unbelievable happened.
The purple explosion twisted.
When the bat hit the dome, it was squished in like a rubber ball and the spreading Unexplored-class power was contained. It was allowed to escape away from the Queen, so it was blasted up toward a point in the blue sky.
This had nothing to do with placing the exorcism circle on top of it. The fluffy white clouds were entirely blown away, the bomber itself was nearly vaporized, and the power was knocked outside the atmosphere. The Lady of Purple Lightning would have been acting like a strobe light at the center, so she had likely been carried away with it.
Once she finished swinging, the White Queen wiped her brow with the back of her hand as if she had worked up a sweat. At some point and for some reason, her changeable clothing had become a bikini that showed off her bright skin.
She looked back with a wink and a smile.
"What did you think, brother? That was a sneak peek at my summer break watermelon splitting skills☆"
She was making a mockery of the whole affair.
Meanwhile, Max Layard of Perfect Game was legitimately in tears.
His pompadour had grown as limp as damp paper.
"Wha-wha-but!? What!? Th-that was…that was supposed to be another Unexplored-class!!"
Kyousuke found himself staring off into the distance.
It seemed Max had never seen the real deal before. He would have lived a happy life if his ignorance had continued, so Kyousuke felt kind of bad giving him this dark blot in his life.
And he could not exactly rejoice at this situation.
He could already sense the *distortion* that the White (Bikini) Queen had set in place.
She held the bat in both hands and wiggled the tip around as if waiting for just the right timing.
"Hey, hey, heyyy!! Get in the way of this date with my brother and I'll knock you all the way to Pluto. You'll stab straight into that icy land, so when some

obsessed astronomer spots you, there'll be rumors about a frightening man-faced rock, you dimwit!!"
"H-h-hee!!"
"Also, it seems my brother wants to get inside this garbage castle, so I'll be destroying this rude gate that isn't welcoming us properly. Take this☆"
An explosive sound slammed into the world.
The bat grew.
The slender swimsuit girl did not even move her hips when she swung the blunt weapon. It was a completely comical motion, but Pandemonium's thick door split apart like styrofoam despite enduring a blast from the Lady of Purple Lightning. A fragment larger than a refrigerator nearly crushed Max and he seemed to have lost all will to fight. He grabbed Ellie Slide under his arm and made a run for it despite the personal items he was dropping along the way.
"…"
Kyousuke remained silent for a while, but the White Queen swung the white bat around in one hand while giving off a powerful "praise me" aura with a beaming smile on her face.
"Okay, brother. I opened the way for you. Shouldn't you rub my head a little and hold your head high at how wonderful your girlfriend is?"
"…Yeah, that would be what you were after with this," spat out Kyousuke with a hand on his forehead. "It's true I'm more or less invincible right now. I can exterminate any summoner and destroy the thickest doors and cruelest traps with a single word. …*But none of it is my power.* Queen, you're trying to make people hate me so much that I can't remain safe without your power, aren't you?"
"Ha ha☆"
The bat and bikini returned to her original dress and the silver twintail girl clapped her hands together in front of her chest.
And she spoke with a carefree smile on her face.
"What a silly thing to say, brother. I'm not trying to do anything. Every part of me – from every hair on my head to the very center of my soul – already belongs to you."
"…"
Kyousuke shook his head.
What if the White Queen was his and he became a special being who had that power? There were countless summoners who mistakenly thought they could do that and it never worked out well for them. They assumed acquiring the Queen would make them almighty, happy, and victorious. If that was all they saw in it, they were almost guaranteed to fail before even meeting her.
It was a lot like being unable to live without air conditioning, online shopping, and GPS-linked map apps after starting to use them.
Convenience was a black hole that could twist the human heart.

Shiroyama Kyousuke told himself to never give in to temptation and to maintain himself. If he relied on that even once, it was all over.
“Brother, what are your plans now?”
The White Queen’s clothing wriggled around her.
And it changed form in the blink of an eye.
“Go, go, brother. Lovely☆”
“Why are you a cheerleader with pompoms in your hands?”
“To inspire you with courage, brother. Take a look at this physical beauty and all its healthy athleticism☆”
“…”
“Oh, you don’t like it? Would you be more inspired by something a little less healthy? Then how about a bunny girl, a nurse, a maid, a waitress, a naked apron, or a kunoichi?”
Her outfit really did change as she made each suggestion, so there was nothing he could say. Kyousuke was truly fed up with the presentation of transforming seduction, so he focused on his thoughts.
The answer was right in front of him.
If he entered the door the White Queen had destroyed, searched the place, and defeated any summoners who came running, he would learn everything he wanted to know.
But he felt a chill run down his spine.
He could not take the first step which should have been the easiest part.
If he crossed the border just a few meters ahead of him, he would be safely protected from this hellish battlefield. He could see no enemies in any direction and this would be his only chance. But if he crossed that border, he knew a laser bombardment would mercilessly blast him from outside the atmosphere.
A normal person would not have noticed and been blown away.
But Kyousuke could see beyond the blue sky.
(If I keep going, I’ll gather too much negative attention. It won’t just be the Deltaston family; the entire world will bare its fangs against me. That wouldn’t be a problem with the Queen on my side, but that would mean she had a situation where she’s my only hope. Giving into temptation here is too dangerous. I won’t be able to break my dependence on the Queen afterwards.)
Kyousuke breathed a heavy sigh.
“…I don’t need your help.”
“Hee hee☆”
He rejected her, but the silver twintail girl looked happy as she reverted to her original clothing. She may have been fine with anything so long as he was interacting with her.
Being with the White Queen is far too dangerous, he concluded anew. She did not even need to do anything special. This was D.R.O.K., an international trade show where tens of thousands of summoners and vessels had gathered. That meant everyone here knew her value. Simply walking

around with her and keeping her to himself could easily create an explosion of any number of emotions: jealousy, envy, hatred, fear, etc. And if enough of that built up, it could even begin a *riot that could only be stopped with the Queen's power.* Once that began, it might spread outside of D.R.O.K. An all-out war with the Deltaston family was one thing, but Kyousuke did not want to make an enemy of the entire world.
It pained him to turn away from the shortest path, but he changed how he looked at this.
"I'll have to go at this from a different angle."
"…Hmm."
The White Queen gave a meaningful wink and murmur (and just like a mysterious book of prophecy, trying to read deeper meaning into it was enough to fall into its trap) and Kyousuke crouched down. Max Layard of Perfect Game had dropped a few personal items. Kyousuke picked up the smartphone he found. He used a few special techniques to deactivate the fingerprint authorization and then glanced through the data. It was entirely for work use, so it was made to open doors just by holding it up to an IC reader and it hosted the webcam that supported the bomber.
He operated the touchscreen, compared the data with the current situation, and commented on what he found.
"This is weird. This is really weird."
"What is it?"
Kyousuke ignored the bright white smile and thought to himself.
Then he decided on a plan.
"I can't charge blindly into Pandemonium."
"Hee hee hee, hee hee hee hee hee! Oh, brother, you're so adorable. Why would you walk away from the conclusion when it's right in front of you? Do you want to enjoy our date a little longer?"
That sounded like a cruel joke, but with the White Queen, she really might wipe out humanity over something so "trivial".
He did not let her influence him and he focused on what he had to do.
A large entrance sat open before his eyes. It was Pandemonium's entrance and it was the shortest route to the truth. But he used all his strength to shake free of that spider web of temptation. The Queen had freely opened that path for him, so there had to be a catch. And not just some vague idea. It would be dangerous to take action until he knew what exactly that catch was. No matter how rushed, impatient, and hurried he felt, he could not settle for the easy way out and he needed the strength to step back from that powerful attraction.
"I need to start my attack with someone who probably knows more about this than anyone else. That Perfect Game pair would have worked, but they've probably gone into hiding. And I can't exactly search for them while dragging around the Queen who is more noticeable than the sun. I'll have to check elsewhere."
"So where exactly are you going, brother?"

The boy did not hesitate to answer his worst possible partner.
“The big boss who infiltrated the three major powers and set up this farce they call the Divine Right of Kings. I’m going straight for the head of the Deltaston family.”

Part 4

(Timeline “Now”)
Kyousuke’s top priority was to confirm the safety of Himekawa Mika and the rest of the 353 vessels in Pandemonium.
There was a decent chance that Himekawa was inside the White Queen, but that was only a theory and he had no proof.
He wanted more information to help fill in his missing memories and arrive at the truth.
To do that, he needed to directly attack someone from the Deltaston family that was running the Pandemonium project. Instead of starting at the center, he would part the forgetful waters of Lethe from the outer edges.
That was his plan.
“Oh, my. Brother, they’re selling fried bananas. You can fry bananas? But they’re fruit!”
“…”
Kyousuke tried to empty his mind as the White Queen clung to his arm and expressed interest in the food for sale. The summoners and vessels in the crowd grew needlessly noisy once more.
“Her Majesty!? Kh, but would it be best for her if I didn’t bother her now…!?”
“Gozaru, gozaru. …If the Queen stirred things up, maybe I could escape my current standstill…”
“I won’t bother her, but what if I stood right at the edge of her view? Sh-she’s looking at meeeeeeeee!!”

Kyousuke immediately tried to leave, but the Queen grinned and pinned him to the spot like an anchor. He struggled for a bit, but he finally concluded buying her some fried fruit in a paper package was more cost effective than cutting off his arm.
“Hm, hm. The texture is so different when it’s fried. Would you call this a snack or a kind of chips?”
“That’s a banana with vegetable oil, so it’s loaded with calories.”
“And it comes with vanilla ice cream, so you never get tired of it. It’s hot but cold! Look, brother, you try this new texture too. Say ‘ah’☆”
“And they give you so much of it… Why are you in such a good mood, anyway? Oh, is it because the banana flesh, the fried coating, and the vanilla ice cream are all white?”
“Hee hee. The White Queen loves bananas!!”
“I won’t stop you, but still…”
“U-um, brother? Isn’t that being a little cruel? I know I’m in an extra good mood because of this date, but don’t you have too many fantasies about how girls are supposed to be?”
That had nothing to do with this.
Kyousuke walked through the noisy crowd with the White Queen, but the silver twintail girl completely ignored them.
“Hee hee. Ee hee hee. I can’t believe I’m walking next to you like this, brother… I think I’m going to get greedy and stand on your right side. Hee hee. Your dominant hand is all mine! I am the center of your being!!”
“…”
No matter where he went, the White Queen was too conspicuous. And only an incense expert like Ellie Slide could prevent expert summoners and vessels from recognizing them to travel incognito. It was less than ideal for pursuing or being pursued by someone. It was like wrapping Christmas lights around your body and running around the mountains at night to hunt timid baby deer.
But there were people whose position would prevent them from fleeing.
For example, the head of the noble Deltaston family.
The greater the VIP the more meaning each and every one of their actions held. Someone that important would not be allowed to remove his fan from his face even if a hurricane was approaching. The juvenile concept of “being mocked” was mostly seen during the so-called “gang age”, but at his level, it was a major concern that could make a small crack in the dam and lead to a revolt.
So…
“A top-class hotel with a casino, an opera house, and a pool salon? The cheapest rooms are the suites and the fanciest is the Excellently Royal Special Breezing-… What is with this name? It sounds like a coffee with lots of cream on top.”
“Whatever it is, it’s still just a collection of containers.”
Kyousuke looked up at the giant structure.

It was indeed a stack of boxy containers, but each one was larger than a school gym. And in some cases, the inner walls had been torn down to connect them together. They were not stacked evenly, so effort had been made to give it a modern art look.
“Officially, it’s a social gathering place where Government, Illegal, and Freedom can stay to make connections, but the Deltaston family is involved in all of it. I bet the one family has the entire place to themselves. …And they’re even running a musical based on the *legend* of the White Queen. I’m not sure if that’s having awful taste or just plain insane…”
“Brother, why not upgrade your room? If we’re going to be flirting, I want at least a king-sized bed. Oh, but having to share a single futon in a tiny room would be great too…”
“Is that all you ever think about?”
“Y-you have it all wrong!! It’s important to start by bringing our feelings together with a kiss!!”
The best way to defend against attacks, abductions, and assassinations was to hide your location, but a VIP could not do that. It would be a problem if people assumed they were hiding because they were scared. That was why the location of the palace or residence of a nation’s leader would be public knowledge. Locating them was easy and they were almost never allowed to flee. That made paying them a visit simple. …Assuming, that is, you had enough power to break through the thick walls.
“So how are you going to do this, brother? I will simply be following you around, so are you going with the standard plan of breaking through this flimsy paper box and dragging your target out of the rubble?”
“How is that the standard plan?”
“Oh, but if you go the front desk and tell them the peak of the Unexplored-class is kindly paying them a visit, they might roll out the red carpet and show us right in.”
“That’s exactly what would happen, so I’m not doing that.”
The White Queen worked just as well as a master key here. She could force anything through for him, but it would also explosively increase the negative attention he received. If the White Queen decided to leave for some reason, he would be destroyed by the hatred and jealousy of both the Deltaston family and the entire world, so he would be forced into a pathetic life of dependency on and servitude to the Queen.
So Kyousuke steeled his resolve and reminded himself not to include the Queen’s power in his calculations.
“Wherever it’s located, the structure of a hotel makes it easy to sneak in. This way, Queen.”
“Boo. Sneaking in the back way goes against my principles. Besides, I doubt even hiding on the dark side of the moon would mask my presence.”
“We don’t need to hide.”
She went along with his vaguely-described plan.

Kyousuke circled behind the hotel and boldly turned the emergency door's knob. It was not locked, but opening it set off an alarm. However, he did not panic and the two of them slipped inside the closest linen room. They were inside a giant container, but the interior was made to hide that fact. Wallpaper and carpet covered the walls and floor and it looked just like a luxury hotel. Kyousuke saw a large washing machine, dryer, and pushcart along the wall. He borrowed a blank cream-colored cardkey he spotted along with the cleaning team's personal items.
"Hotels have far more master keys than normal apartment buildings. It isn't all that well known, but they go missing all the time. We can get in anywhere with this, so it seems pretty careless of them."
"Hmm. But isn't a stealth mission physically impossible with me tagging along? If we walk another 20m, the entire world will find out and we'll be rushed by passionate worshipers and the paparazzi. Since I am not in an Artificial Sacred Ground, I show up on cameras and sensors, so this is the perfect chance to make some holy icons."
"You don't need to worry about that."
"?"
As Kyousuke spoke, he grabbed a bath towel, a toolbox, and a roll of duct tape he found in the linen room.
The formally ringing alarm automatically stopped.
The White Queen watched in interest to see what he was doing and he immediately took her back out into the hallway. The silver twintail girl spoke like a navigator.
"I sense something at the door on the left 15 meters ahead. It's going to open."
That was exactly what happened.
Instead of a guest room, the door likely led to a break room or kitchenette for employees. The door opened outwards and someone started to stick their head out.
"Okay, brother. What are you going to-…wahyah!?"
The Queen's voice was cut off by Kyousuke grabbing her silver twintail head and roughly tousling her hair all around. Not only did he mess up her hair, but he threw the bath towel at her.
With the toolbox and duct tape in hand, Kyousuke put on a deeper and gravelly voice. Instead of running or hiding from the maid-like cleaner woman, he actually approached her.
"We only have 20 minutes until rehearsal, so what do you mean you got lost!? You wanted to take a smoke to calm your nerves? I can't believe what I'm hearing! You're in your stage costume! You'll ruin it with the yellow cigarette resin. You can't let your guard down just because we have a spare. Who knows what other trouble we'll run across before the performance!!"
"Eh? Huh?"
The White Queen looked utterly bewildered and Kyousuke bowed toward the cleaning lady as they passed by.

“Sorry about all the noise. You know how things can be, so please forgive us! …C’mon, you bow too. We’ve set foot in a professional’s territory!! Now let’s get to the rehearsal! Honestly, the kid I’m dressed as is called Alice (with) Rabbit, right? I’m just the prop guy, so think how I must feel dressing up to help you practice. I had to skip lunch for this and I’m not even getting paid for it!!”
“H-hnyah. Brother…”
As he grabbed her slender arms and tugged her forward, the Queen’s cheeks grew red.
Kyousuke ignored it as he made his smartphone ring and pretended to answer it.
“What is it now!? …Oh, producer? Yes, I found that stubborn woman!! You need to chew her out too. We can’t have that legendary White Queen squatting behind the hotel smoking a cigarette!! She’s dressed like a world famous individual, so we’d get a flood of complaints if someone got a photo!! How would we explain that to our sponsors!?”
Kyousuke continued feigning chitchat as he and the Queen passed by the cleaning lady. Their abnormal outfits backed up their story and the phone created an invisible barrier that prevented her from asking any questions.
Kyousuke made his way to the employee elevator and the White Queen giggled with the bath towel over her head.
“I see. So being famous can come in handy sometimes. Isn’t – that – right – brother?”
“I’m not like you. You’re the one that’s standing out.”
“A-and, brother, can you tousle my hair again!?”
“Cling to me too much and it’ll mess with our supposed ‘roles’ of actress and prop guy. …No, wait. This might actually be better. If it looks like we’re secret lovers, she might accept why we were sneaking around out back.”
“S-s-s-secret lovers!!!???”
The White Queen started glowing, so Kyousuke frantically shoved her into the employee elevator.
They would normally need a cardkey to visit a special floor, but that was only for the guest elevators. For convenience’s sake, the employee one allowed anyone to visit any floor. …And needing a cardkey would not matter when all the employees had a master key in the first place.
“P-pat me, pat me!! Please pat my head some more, brother! …But some information will remain saying we were wandering around an off limits area. Once they realize the cardkey is missing, won’t we be the first people they suspect? Pat me, pat me! Come on, pat me, pat me!!”
“The door has closed, so we don’t need to keep up the act. …And how would they find us? They would go after the real musical group in the hotel’s opera house, wouldn’t they? And how would that lead them to us? By the time the Deltaston family’s bodyguard team begins searching some innocent stranger’s possessions, we’ll be done here.”

“Eh heh heh. So you’re willing to frame people as long as their name will be cleared in the end? You really are crazy in your own way, brother☆”
“You have no right whatsoever to call anyone crazy.”
This was not a high-rise structure made of reinforced concrete, so the elevator reached the floor they wanted in no time.
Much like Aika’s apartment, the space was the size of a school building and took up the entire floor. But by the time they reached the one and only entrance used by both the employee and guest elevators, Kyousuke could tell something was not right.
“…I knew it.”
“Knew what, brother?”
“Why wasn’t there a single bodyguard? This is the palace for the king who built this temporary city for tens of thousands of summoners and vessels!”
Kyousuke recalled Max Layard’s smartphone he had acquired before coming here.
It had contained a fair amount of information, but something else had caught his interest.
Perfect Game should have been closer than anyone to Government here and thus to the Deltaston family, but *they had not received a single call or message that looked like it might have been about a job.* Almost like the organization itself was not functioning. If Kyousuke’s memories were accurate, there had been a fair number of summoners and vessels inside Pandemonium, but there was not even an email about delivering food or living supplies.
That may have only been a small oddity.
It may not have been worth turning back when Pandemonium was right in front of his eyes and the truth was within reach.
But that was wrong.
Even that had required the strength to turn back.
Ignoring a slight problem in order to reach for a great prize was like ignoring the risk of losing control and grabbing the White Queen’s hand while assuming he could manage it without any proof that was the case. If he let those thoughts tempt him, he would be swallowed up before he knew it.
It was because he was faced with an amazing opportunity that he had to make extra certain he did not lose sight of himself.
And he had made it this far, even if it had required a boring detour.
He used the cleaning master key to open the door and stepped inside, but he only found a painful silence. He checked the living room that had a full home theater system, the kitchen that was far too large for only preparing drinks and snacks, a bath so large it looked more like a pool bar, and a bedroom with a king-sized canopy bed, an audio system to play sleep-inducing music, and an aroma oil set, but there was no sign of anyone.
There were a lot of personal possessions for a hotel room and there were so many pieces of artwork and antiques decorating the space that it was easy

to forget it filled an entire floor. There was an ancient Greek sculpture, a model ship, an antique gramophone, and a shield on the wall with a crest that was probably the Deltaston family's. The glittering red, white, and blue jewels somehow made it look cheap. As part of the Round Table, their personal possessions were all Western. They were probably all quite valuable, but none of them went well with each other. The room simply felt oppressive.

That was why he overlooked it at first.

Something was leaning against the wall, but he had mistaken it for one of the room's ugly pieces of art, like a grandfather clock or an overly decorated music box.

"Brother."

When the silver twintail girl in a white dress gently guided his attention, that "something" slid down the wall. It hit the floor, flipped over, and told Kyousuke this was the worst case scenario here.

An elderly man in a luxurious gown lay there.

There was no light of intelligence in his eyes. Even as he lay on his side, he continued moving like someone walking with a cane.

This was the sign of a loser in the Summoning Ceremony.

The shock of seeing his god killed before his eyes had left him repeating the same action like a zombie in the original sense of the word. He would obey any gestured or spoken instructions and would even walk right off a cliff if guided to do so.

"So the Deltaston family's emperor is wearing no clothes, hm?"

Naturally, he could not have ended up like this on his own.

If he had lost, then someone had to have won.

Based on the situation, Kyousuke doubted even 24 hours had passed since he had entered this state.

But some of his wounds were more severe than others and some had healed more than others. He may have received them when collapsing upon his defeat, but that meant he had fought multiple times over multiple days. Was he beat back down every time the state wore off?

If so…

"It started with him, but someone else hijacked the plan," groaned Kyousuke.

Looking at the poor old man sent pain racing through the back of his mind. This was stimulating the scab on his memories.

This had started as a slight sense that something was off.

But he had been right to obey it.

If he had charged into Pandemonium without knowing anything, it almost certainly would have cost him his life. He would have held out his shield in the wrong direction and the downpour of arrows would have skewered him.

Simply put, he had needed to deal with this problem first.

"Who's in control of Pandemonium!?"

Part 5

(Timeline “Past”)
The night was growing late.
After successfully infiltrating Pandemonium, Shiroyama Kyousuke and Himekawa Mika hid among the complex array of passageways and rooms. They had intended to use the large density of summoners to defeat one after another while using the Chain state to maintain a powerful Material and break into the center where the processor core and its 353 vessels were. Their opponents always had to start at the Regulation-class with a cost of 1, so Kyousuke could defeat an entire group once he had built up a Divine or Unexplored-class. A true demon king would be sweeping away the scouts and foot soldiers.
But.
After managing to summon the Unexplored-class “Ashen” Shrine Maiden who Invites Merciful and Dignified Death (em – ao – lev – ck – rol – ei – vb – yu – a – ps), their Chain broke and the original vessel returned. Needless to say, this was not due to a lack of skill on Kyousuke’s part.
“They intentionally had all the enemy summoners keep their distance to break our Chain.” The boy bluntly analyzed the situation. “I had assumed their coordination would be poor since they’re a mixture of Government, Illegal, and Freedom, but the Deltaston family must have more control than I thought.”
Kyousuke’s protective circle vanished and his vessel returned to being a bluish-black-haired ponytail woman in a navy blue tight skirt suit with torn stockings that showed off her bright skin. Himekawa glanced around and asked a question.
“Th-then what will they do next?”
“Don’t ask me.”
(They should already know they can’t beat me even if we’re all starting with Cost 1 Regulation-classes. And I doubt they’ll use the indiscriminate destruction of a Holy Key Woman to release an uncontrollable Divine-class inside Pandemonium. …If they’re being managed well, they’ll probably go for a little cannibalism. They’ll fight each other to build up an ace Material before attacking us again.)
Discussing that would only worry his partner, so he kept silent.
(That just means we have to do the same thing they did. After they reduce their numbers with the cannibalism, their Chain only lasts 90 seconds. If we can escape, the Material they sacrificed their own people for will be entirely wasted.)

Summoners used otherworldly beings that exceeded human understanding. Just because an opponent or situation seemed hopeless or too much to handle, they could not give into fear and stop thinking. They had to accept their weakness as a human and then use that to overcome it. That was the true essence of a summoner.
Kyousuke maintained a unique mental state that kept him relaxed enough to perform as best as possible while remaining tense.
“Mika.”
“That’s Mika-*san*. What is it?”
“Don’t force yourself. I doubt you’ve fully recovered from the cold water earlier. Find something around here to warm yourself with.”
“It’s been a while since then and I was fighting while transforming into Materials.”
“I’m saying it's coming back.”
Kyousuke had not overlooked the unnatural trembling in the core of Himekawa Mika’s body.
Being a vessel mostly came down to an issue of inborn talent, but the ability to be a spiritual medium was not always a plus. If they did not bind their own mind with restraint-like accessories, they could easily erroneously and accidently summon evil or vengeful spirits.
That did not seem to have happened this time, but a less serious problem was showing itself.
Kyousuke was pretty sure it was a condition known as an Imaginary Flashback.
“Any frustrations or desires held just before transforming into a Material will return with twice the intensity when you transform back. Of course you’re going to be having trouble after such a chill.”
“Uuh…”
It was like having your forgotten sleepiness come rushing back once the effects of the energy drink wore off. All physical effects were negated while in Material form, but that did not mean the vessel’s physical body recovered.
“Mika, there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. Not only were you forced into a mental battle with an otherworldly monster, but you’re a Holy Key Woman which has to make it worse. It makes sense you would run into problems more often than a normal vessel.”
“It’s Mika-*san*! Uuh…so it’s an error? But it’s still embarrassing…”
They were not in a military control room full of strange gauges and they were not in an armory where a single match would trigger an explosion large enough to blow them all the way to the moon. It was a space larger than a school classroom with drink and bread vending machines along the wall and several tables in the center. The chairs could recline for taking naps in them and the armrests had folded blankets on them.
(10m x 20m x…)

It was obvious if you thought about it, but even a military facility was run by people and they would need normal living spaces to supply the basic necessities.
(17.04m? What a shame. It's so close to being 1 x 2 x √3.)
Kyousuke thought on the spatial observations that any summoner picked up as a habit.
At any rate, they only needed 5 or 10 minutes. He had Himekawa sit in a chair with the back reclined and he somewhat forcibly placed a blanket over her. But then the woman in the navy blue tight skirt shivered.
"Uuh… When you warm up a cold body so quickly, um, the difference in temperature…affects the bladder."
"I can turn the other way if you want."
"No, I'm fine. I have my pride!"
As he poured hot water in a cup of instant noodles on the table, Himekawa spoke while curled up in the blanket.
"Kyousuke-kun, you said I look a lot like a woman you used to know, didn't you?"
"What about it?"
"…I most likely knew the same person."
She revealed that information with a faint smile.
Kyousuke looked surprised, so she continued.
"Or rather, I remade my entire life plan to be more like her. My physique, my clothing, my mannerisms, my educational history, my skills, and my definition of salvation… You may have felt bad when you couldn't help but compare me to someone else, but being told I'm just like her actually saved me. It told me I hadn't chosen the wrong path."
"But she was part of Government."
"I pursued Madam Professor after she disappeared. But the higher ups would not let me view her information while I was in Government, so I thought I might have more luck if I joined their enemies in Illegal."
The truth of that was hidden in darkness.
And that was a deep darkness that got to the root of Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen.
Those were not secrets an individual's effort could reach. But Himekawa Mika did not view Kyousuke with hostility or mistrust. She only narrowed her eyes gently.
Oh, so that woman continued being herself even after she vanished.
And this boy inherited something from her.
Even if she is no longer here and we can only speak of her as someone from the past, she remained true to herself to the end and must not have felt any regret about her life.
That was what those eyes said.
"…She was a strange person." Kyousuke suddenly found himself speaking.
"For one thing, she was always terribly careless. She was almost always late, she would drink alcohol at work, she refused to eat any vegetables

except for cabbage and radishes, and she lost interest so fast she couldn't finish a movie, a novel, or even a manga. In her work, she would say the system was too coldhearted and that it lacked humanity, so she would write her own script into the blank spaces. Watching her made me seriously think that simply aging wasn't enough to call someone an adult. I started wondering if we needed some kind of national exam like we do for driver's licenses. She would make anyone and everyone mad, but strangely, everyone ended up laughing by the end. Even the coldhearted developers and fighters."

Himekawa's expression softened as she accepted the cup of noodles.

"Yeah…ha ha. I more or less know what you mean with all that."

"And she often seemed entirely clueless. That Miniature Garden five hundred meters below the earth was a psychedelic egg where hidden knowledge and cutting-edge technology mixed, but even there, she taught us something incredibly strange."

"What was it?"

"When you first see someone in the morning, give them a cheerful greeting."

Kyousuke smiled faintly as he repeated the words of someone who was no longer with them.

"Isn't that strange? But she really did teach us that. She threw out the Sewn Realm Summoning meant to monopolize the White Queen and the Fifteen Siblings Project meant to bring peace to all mankind, and she started with that. But I think that led straight to the most important thing. Just like we associate the stars in the chilly night sky to form constellations, I was able to see the slight bit of humanity hidden deep inside people dyed so deeply in the colors of coldhearted cruelty."

It had been a small thing.

But it had been a necessary gear toward producing great meaning.

It had to be due to the accumulation of those miniscule but undoubtedly right things that had allowed Shiroyama Kyousuke to avoid drowning in the White Queen's power and to continue fighting against that absolute temptation. He had been given the power to view the world head-on instead of from a cynical angle. And that obvious thing had given him the strength to reject the Queen's overwhelming power even if every other summoner and vessel succumbed to it.

"If you have a unique background or objective, some irregular behavior is allowed. Society is accepting of eccentrics as long as they have a useful sort of genius. The little things can be overlooked in the face of the big things. … I'm certain it was thanks to those people that I didn't use any of those outs. I'm not about to say I'm average for this world, but it's because of the normal things they taught me that I can *just barely* avoid crossing the line."

Without that, he would have succumbed.

He would have been swallowed up by the symbol of uniqueness that was the White Queen and he would have been irreparably distorted.

Or perhaps Shiroyama Kyousuke would have become a monster even greater than the Queen.
“Biondetta said our original families had betrayed us, sold us, and abandoned us. She said we had no friends in that cramped Miniature Garden, that all the adults were cruel, that the social structure was shallow, and that our sibling bonds were only artificial and thus untrustworthy.”
It was slight, but there was some bitterness in his voice.
“But there was more there if you pulled back the veils of suspicion and hatred and looked closely. Maybe it was like the Buddhist concept of Issui Shiken. The exact same lake seems to glitter with jewels to a Deva and seems filled with blood to a Preta; it’s all in your viewpoint. It’s true that the path the 15 of us walked may have been truly terrible and unlike anything a normal person experiences. Even my view of ‘normal’ may be terribly distorted. But that Miniature Garden contained more than just a perfect machine. Those were living and breathing humans. Everyone’s expression softened when Madam Professor was around. But she said that was something we all already had inside us. So no matter how coldhearted everyone acted, they had to have a warmth that would leak out as soon as they relaxed.”
Biondetta had been furious. She had said Kyousuke had been the only one of the 15 children not to break because he alone had received the Queen’s love.
But Kyousuke saw things differently.
He suspected Biondetta and the others had received *too much exposure* to the White Queen. Perhaps it was like a halo effect, but they had mistakenly decided each and every one of that powerful girl’s words held great meaning. When a national idol shook your hand in hers and smiled at you specifically, everything else seemed to vanish. The small kindness and favor of those closer to you were blown away. It had been just like that.
But what if they had not been trapped by that bright sun?
What if they had still recognized the shine of the stars twinkling in the night sky?
They might have seen an entirely different world.
Even if it had been an isolated space, that miniature garden had been large. It had taken 1000 people to keep it running. It was impossible to feel alone there as long as you looked to them.
Himekawa Mika narrowed her eyes a little as she drank the noodle soup and slurped up the noodles.
“But it wasn’t you that found that possibility.”
“Right. It was definitely thanks to those people. That wasn’t something some idiot who acts like a genius could do.”
Then Kyousuke quickly looked up.
He strained his ears and sensed a slight smell in the air.
“…They’re here.”
“Eh? Eh?”

“Mika, our break is over once you’re done eating. There was an odd change in the echoing footsteps of the summoners who have entered a Chain state, and I just detected the scent of an Incense Grenade.”
She pulled off her blanket and the two of them ran out of the break room and into the passageway. A young female summoner was just turning a corner further down the passageway.
She was accompanied by a Divine-class with a cost of 6 from the low sound range.
That giant bird from Indian mythology was Vishnu’s mount as well as the enemy of all snakes. This summoner could not have just summoned this Divine-class, so it was most likely the result of “cannibalism” in which she had fought her fellow summoners to use them as a stepping stone. If Kyousuke challenged her with the Cost 1 Regulation-class Original Series, he would be defeated instantly.
“Found you☆”
The summoner began running toward them. If they were caught in the 20m field around her, the Chain state would switch to a normal battle.
But Kyousuke only grabbed his vessel’s shoulders and stepped back a single step.
That was all.
The Artificial Sacred Ground that should have swallowed them up vanished like a switch had been thrown.
“Wha-…?”
The Chain state only lasted 90 seconds.
The White Thorns were replenished every 10 seconds and a total of 7 could be held in stock, but he could still calculate his enemy’s remaining time by glancing at her stock. Someone taking part in that “cannibalism” would not think about continuing the battle after reaching the Material she wanted.
“Ah?”
And as soon as her Artificial Sacred Ground vanished along with her protective circle and Material, Kyousuke pulled the pin from and threw an Incense Grenade.
This time, he was the master of the Artificial Sacred Ground.
He raised his Blood-Sign and grinned as he challenged her on equal terms.
“My condolences.”

Part 6

The rest did not take long.

Pandemonium had “cannibalized” their own people, so they had used up a lot of their own summoners. And even when they sent all of their precious Divine-classes after him, they could not defeat Kyousuke. There was simple reason for this: when up against someone he knew he could beat, he let the battle stretch on as long as he could.
And during the few battles he fought, he hit plenty of Petals into the Spots and built up his Material as much as possible.
That ultimately gave him the Unexplored-class Lady of Purple Lightning which he used to mow down all of the Divine-classes who ignorantly challenged him as a group. The girl sat in a run-down wheelchair with her sickly pale skin exposed by some highly revealing purple clothing. Each time she pointed her index finger, a beam-like attack would reap every enemy at once.
“Whoa!? That’s the Lady of Purple Lightning. Did we fall for his bait!?”
“It’s no good. All the losers wandering around are in the way! Move them to the side!!”
“Ah, wait. Don’t look this way! Why meeee!?”
After some fighting, they seemed to decide this was not worth it and the summoners from the three major powers began to retreat. Even if Kyousuke’s Material had reached the Unexplored-class, it would still vanish once his Chain state ran out of time.
But Kyousuke did not bother pursuing. With the number of enemy summoners and vessels so greatly reduced, they could not “cannibalize” each other like before. As time passed, their situation would only grow worse.
And he had somewhere he needed to go.
He let the summoners flee and made his way to the Pandemonium’s central processing core. The Chain state ran out on the way and Himekawa Mika returned to her human form, but that did not matter. Now that they knew their “cannibalism” would not work, it would be some time before the Pandemonium summoners thought up another plan. And if there were any sporadic attacks on the way, he could defeat them like normal.
The passageway was filled with a strangely unnerving rumbling with the regularity of a pulse.
(A Repliglass heart reactor? An artery must be running by nearby. That means there must be something here that consumes a ton of energy.)
They met almost no resistance.
Their footsteps sounded loudly on a steel catwalk. The scene below the wire mesh at their feet made it easy to forget this was a limited space inside a fortress. They were more than 10 meters up and the area below was covered in strange transparent spheres. Each one was about the size of a balance ball, some kind of glowing orange core flashed at the center, and several thick black cables attached to the outside. Altogether, it looked like a clump of giant roe or a type of parallel processor.
“Let’s hurry, Kyousuke-kun.”

“Right…”
He focused ahead again and ran toward the final space.
Shiroyama Kyousuke stood in front of an especially thick door as if to a bank vault.
“This is the processing core according to the diagram. The vessels are waiting beyond here!”
“…”
Kyousuke traced his hand along the final door.
He could have broken through it with the firepower of an Unexplored-class, but his Chain had not lasted. He had to use something else.
“It uses a vacuum locking mechanism. Those use the surrounding air pressure to close the door.”
Fortunately, they had acquired detailed plans, so they had information on the door’s mechanism and design. And no matter how sturdy the door, it could not be made into a solid piece of metal without a single screw or welding point. It had to be made of multiple pieces, so it could be dismantled.
“But if we send air into the vacuum layer, the difference in pressure will return to zero. Then the door will open. We can do this. It’s simple. We need to remove a panel and apply heat at a spot that the sensors won’t notice… No matter how fancy the system, a rubber seal is the best way to make it airtight. If the heat reaches that and melts it, the air will flow through the gap and into the vacuum layer!”
His Repliglass Blood-Sign came in handy at times like this.
It could move like a living creature, so if he supported it a little, it could spin like a drill and catch paper or cloth on fire from friction. If he used the beak-like part on the silicon pellet insertion slot, it could even remove screws.
With a loud metallic noise, the door slowly opened outwards and Kyousuke stepped back so as not to be crushed. The sealed processing core ever so gradually came into view.
This was the turning point.
He had to take the 353 vessels with him to escape Pandemonium and he had to think about what to do after that. It would all be meaningless if the vessels were recaptured after he rescued them. It was possible this would require taking on the entire Deltaston family.
But that line of thinking proved naïve.
As the door opened wide, he found no one at all inside the vast space within.
(50 x 50 x…)
It was a giant die-like space with fifty meter sides. Each of the six surfaces was crammed full of geometric patterns with lines as fine as hair. Red, green, and yellow lights pulsed intermittently through them.
(…49.998?)
But that was all.

There were traces of something. Chairs sat in concentric circles like at an international conference. They had belts attached like at the dentist. If all of those were filled, it was possible that more than a hundred people could have fit inside. But they were empty. It was only a drearily empty space.
Where had his assumptions gone wrong?
Had the diagram been wrong or an intentional decoy?
Had everyone been moved elsewhere because Kyousuke and Himekawa's plan had been discovered?
Or…
"I have one question."
Kyousuke slowly turned around.
The ponytail woman in a dark, dark navy blue tight skirt suit had not said anything for a while.
He spoke to Himekawa Mika as the decorations indicating her various sins jangled from her neck.
"What is your true goal? Were there really 353 vessels here!?"

The Story of a Certain Summoner and Vessel 01

Incense Expert Ellie Slide did not subscribe to a view of good and evil.
In fact, she was a truly rootless person and she had no principles based on a specific region, culture, set of traditions, or religion. So she had no interest in the concepts of good and evil that were a part of that.
That was clear enough from how she dressed. She was a Western European witch, but she included Native American aspects such as an eagle feather, piercings across her body, a dreamcatcher, and an axe that doubled as a pipe. She came from a line of witches that had escaped persecution in Europe by crossing over to the New World and secretly taking up root there, but she possessed none of the hopes or grudges of her family.
The giant silver armor-breaking axe had an electronic cigarette device on the end.
The round dreamcatcher hanging from her neck was not a spider web that caught dreams. It mostly contained the symbol of the Rose at the base of the Summoning Ceremony.
Her stance could be seen in the name Amplifier 500 which meant she would thoroughly increase the skill of any summoner she contracted with. She did not follow any specific principles or beliefs and she did not worship any specific religion's god as she traversed the world of the Summoning Ceremony. She was a rootless person through and through.

She had a single goal.
She did not care if they were from Government, Illegal, or Freedom, but she wanted to see the summoner she was paired with reach Award 1000.
She would use whatever she could to accomplish that.
That might mean justice, protection, and world peace.
That might mean evil deeds, cruelty, and the extermination of mankind.
Whatever the ignition was, she only needed a corresponding summoner who would be inspired by it. And true to her name as an amplifier, once she found that ignition, she would thoroughly fan the flames to amplify that mental state in the summoner.
“Pant, pant, pant, pant…!!”
As Ellie pulled a small bottle from her belt and calmly exchanged it for one on the back of her axe, a large black-haired man with a pompadour was soaked with sweat. He doubled over and desperately worked to suppress the tremor rising from the core of his being.
He had tearfully returned to the outer edge of the donut-shaped trade show. Tens of thousands of people filled the D.R.O.K. trade show, but not all of them could get a room at a luxury resort hotel. This area full of RVs and mobile homes may have been the seediest part of the makeshift city.
“Th-that scared the shit out of me… That’s the White Queen for you. I knew what to expect, but damn is she scary!! I ran into that kid in Toy Dream 35 a while back, but there’s something wrong with him if he can hang around that thing!!”
The pompadour man jumped into a beach chair sitting next to a barbecue set. The chair and its parasol toppled over, but he ignored that and sat with his back against the silver mobile home.
He then searched through his pocket and pulled out a small bottle of whisky in his shaking hand. He removed the waterproof paper that was rubber-banded to the side of the bottle and followed the folds to create a container almost too small to hold a single walnut. He poured the clear amber liquid inside and gulped it down. But this was not alcohol. It was kid’s stomachache syrup. He seemed to have enough respect left as a Government summoner to worry about what people around him thought. … At the same time, the practiced motions showed just how often he relied on this.
Not that it was surprising he was terrified.
However, Ellie Slide could not have him losing his nerve. The bottom of her sleeved cape shook as she searched for the necessary entry under good and evil. Then she produced a perfect reflection of it like a mirror.
“Then are you going to give up? That is indeed an option. The Deltaston family, Himekawa Mika, and the rest of the 353 vessels have no direct relation to your life. Abandoning them and walking a more aimless Government path would be much more constructive.”
“Kh.”

“Perfect Game is not an almighty power that ensures you defeat any opponent. It refers to your ability to ultimately rework any result into a victory for yourself. So wouldn’t not fighting be one option? I have heard that both martial artists and chess players are selective about which opponents they will face.”
“…Shut up.”
“Why not begin by deciding at which point you will withdraw. You tend to run straight in without a hint of strategizing, so I doubt you would even think about talking about a strategic retreat as a laughable excuse. So where do you draw the line? Where do you cut your losses and give up? You need to do the calculations and find your own ans-…”
“Okay, boss, let’s cook some buffalo meat on that barbecue set!”
“Yay! I want a hot sandwich.”
“…”
“…”
The exposed midriff girl raised both hands on reflex, so she cleared her throat.
Ellie Slide pouted her lips and poked her index fingers together in front of her chest.
“I-I was the one that supplied that endangered animal meat. It was my skill and achievements that created lush greenery in the middle of the desert, allowing their numbers to recover. So all of that farm buffalo meat should belong to me. So why am I the one begging you for some?”
“If you were in charge of it all, the buffalo would go extinct right after they’d finally recovered.”
“Are you saying I’m obsessed with meat!?”
“Let’s just say I’ve never seen you eating vegetables.”
“Don’t be ridiculous. I eat potato chips and popcorn.”
“That goes beyond ridiculous!!”
They strayed off topic a bit, but that was not a problem.
No matter what happened here – even if he got angry and hit her – it was not a problem for Ellie Slide. As long as that inspired the summoner and gave them the drive they needed to earn further Awards, she would allow anything. If they wanted kindness, she would let them use her lap as a pillow. If they preferred the whip, she would swing a cowhide paddle down at them.
This was not Ellie’s own will.
Just like a fortuneteller, she would seek out the summoner’s distortion and reflect it back at them like a mirror. That was all she did.
Her focus was on seeing the moment the summoner reached Award 1000. The only other thing she cared about was her personal buffalo meat that grew in the artificial farm built in the middle of a desert.
But she did not need kindness or the whip this time.
Just as she had predicted, Max Layard clenched his teeth.

The pompadour man slowly exhaled while sitting on the ground with his back resting against the silver mobile home.
“I know I’m not skilled enough and that I’m out of my league here. I mean, we’re up against Freedom Award 903 and the White Queen herself. There’s no way a normal fight will get us anywhere.”
“And?”
“Like hell I’ll give up. I’m not fighting because I think I’ll win. I’m fighting because I can’t afford to lose.”
Max wiped the unpleasant sweat from his forehead and faced forward.
The fighting spirit had not vanished from his eyes.
“So we’re in my territory now. Winning and losing don’t matter. No matter how cheap or silly it is, I just have to *turn this into my victory* in the end.”
The mirror had worked perfectly.
Incense Expert Ellie Slide did not subscribe to a view of good and evil.
She was nothing more than an amplifier.
If Max Layard had been an evil person, the amplified evil would have taken several lives. If he had been a good person, the amplified good would have saved several lives.

Facts

- Incense Expert Ellie Slide’s techniques allow her to create normal Incense Grenades, obstruct the production and expansion of a summoner’s Artificial Sacred Ground, and interfere with their recognition of her.
- When a summoner steps into an already established Artificial Sacred Ground, they must use up three White Thorns. The initial number is three, so they must survive unprotected for ten seconds before one is replenished and they can finally take part in the battle.
- In a one-against-many battle, a group of three or more has an overwhelming advantage. By summoning one of each sound range and surrounding their opponent, they are guaranteed to have that opponent’s weakness.
- The head of the Deltaston family had lost a Summoning Ceremony battle, turning him into something akin to a walking corpse. If he was instructed or guided into revealing various privileges or passwords, complete control of Pandemonium might have shifted to a third party.

- An Imaginary Flashback is a minor summoning error that affects vessels. Any frustration or desire they hold just before transforming into a Material will return with twice the intensity after transforming back.
- Kyousuke and Himekawa had an acquaintance in common.
- The 353 vessels imprisoned inside Pandemonium were nowhere to be found.

Stage 03: The Elegant Throne which Invites That Queen

「さあ、恭介君。いいえ、『不殺王(アリス(ウィズ)ラビット)』」

「私達を、たすけて」

(『Now』Stage03 Open 06/03 12:45)
(『Past』Stage03 Open 06/02 23:20)

ステージ03

かの女王をお招きする雅な玉座

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Now, Kyousuke-kun. No, Alice (with) Rabbit.”
“Save us.”
(“Now” Stage 03 Open 06/03 12:45)
(“Past” Stage 03 Open 06/02 23:20)
The Elegant Throne which Invites That Queen

Part 1

(Timeline “Now”)
It was past noon in a luxury hotel room as quiet as the Mary Celeste.
Kyousuke covered his face with a hand.
He did not understand the meaning of the vision in his mind.
“…Wait a second.”
“?”
The White Queen really did tilt her head like a navigator who had been told to wait.
“What am I involved in here? What happened after that job request?”
The vessel closest to him had vanished.
This new information could entirely change what that meant. He did not want it to be true, but he could feel himself beginning to measure Himekawa Mika as an enemy. He began to suspect she had maliciously dressed and acted like an old acquaintance to earn his trust.
He needed to investigate this again.
Who was his enemy? On whose side did Max Layard and Ellie Slide of Perfect Game stand? What was his true relationship with Himekawa Mika, his missing vessel? What about the Deltaston family with its leader lying here as a loser? Who was connected to whom, who was harming whom, and what purpose had there been in opening the door to Pandemonium’s processing core?
“Brother, I doubt all the information you need can be found in this room. After all, the person who did this to that man will have been inside here. Wouldn’t they have retrieved and disposed of anything they didn’t want seen?”
“I don’t need documents. I just have to talk to him myself.”
Kyousuke crouched down and focused on the old man in a gown who lay on the floor while slowly and endlessly acting like he was walking with a cane. He was a lot like a zombie in the original sense of the word and he would obey anyone’s instructions, but he could barely think and could not understand any complicated signs.

Kyousuke kept it short.
“Tell me.”
“…?”
“Tell me everything about Pandemonium and what’s hidden there.”
“That question is too indirect,” commented the Queen.
“That’s fine.”
Kyousuke cut off her disruption as the old man on the floor began speaking quietly.
“…Pandemonium’s convenience is no more than a decoy to hide its true purpose…”
“Its true purpose?”
“Pandemonium is not…just a Box meant to simplify the Summoning Ceremony… It is meant to destroy the established hierarchy of Materials… and create a new possibility…”
“Possibility?”
“…So that we might receive the divine right of kings…”
“Go back one. Destroy?”
By repeating a single word or phrase from what he said, Kyousuke could guide the old man’s slow and wandering conversation.
It started as a series of random words, but he was cutting deeper and closer to the crux of the matter.
“Pandemonium can manifest new Materials…that ignore the existing costs and sound ranges. For example, even if you summon the same Material…the strength will be different between the Blood-Sign method and the Pandemonium method…”
“…?”
One phrase caught his interest.
“The strength will be different?”
“The Divine and Unexplored-classes summoned with the Blood-Sign method…do not come with their full strength. …There is always a factor of decay. Is Seth of Egyptian Mythology or Yamata-no-Orochi of Japanese Mythology stronger…? There is no definite answer…but with the Blood-Sign method, the answer is Yamata-no-Orochi because it has a higher cost. Even the sound ranges lose all meaning once the difference in cost reaches 10… It comes down to the summoning method and the compatibility between the gods…”
Kyousuke was unsure what word to choose.
He placed his hand on his chin while crouching.
“Factor of decay?”
“The actual equation is unknown. …But if the power of the gods can be increased or decreased based on the summoning method, it would also be possible to create a great enough increase to overturn the existing hierarchy… A Divine-class would be able to defeat an Unexplored-class…or the White Queen at the very top could be dragged down from the throne of the strongest…”

That felt like having a stake driven through his heart.
He tried to be extremely careful so the Queen would not notice, but the silver twintail girl simply smiled elegantly.
“Overturn the existing hierarchy?”
“The Blood-Sign method…categorizes Materials with letters and uses that to assist in the summoning. You could say the preexisting gods are managed via spelling and that overwrites them in a form that humans can perceive… So couldn’t the same god’s cost and sound range change if they are represented with another word? Think of it as the difference between the Norse goddess Freyja…and Freya. This has never been practically proven with the Blood-Sign method…but the theoretical possibility exists, so there must be a loophole somewhere. And that fits perfectly with our objective in the Deltaston family…”
If writing was not an aspect of civilization gifted to mankind by the gods, then the gods’ names were being expressed with a human language. To put it another way, it may have been like switching a telescope’s lens while viewing a star, but it was all just a theory. Kyousuke thought it was a very dangerous tightrope walk.
“Your objective?”
“The Deltaston family desires absolute authority… That perfect authority would be unshakable by anyone…not even the White Queen at the very, very top… By escaping the fear and control of that Queen…man can finally return to being man. In accordance with the concept of noblesse oblige…we in the Deltaston family are obligated to take on that burden…”
Kyousuke breathed a heavy sigh.
In any other situation, he would have loved to listen to this until morning.
“Escape?”
“By summoning the Wicked ‘Green’ Woman who Fills the World with Empty Treasure…one of the Three from the Unexplored-class…and increasing her power with Pandemonium…we will tear down the hierarchy and defeat the White Queen…”
The old man was probably telling the truth.
In fact, his zombie-like state did not leave him with enough of a will to lie.
The boy slowly stood up and the White Queen gave an exasperated comment.
“What a foolish idea.”
“Perhaps so.” Kyousuke decided to avoid argument for the time being. “But this is strange. If they were trying to summon the Wicked Green Woman, then why is it the White Queen standing here?”
“Who knows. Why don’t you ask him?”
He tried, but the old man said nothing.
Kyousuke frowned.
“He can’t refuse to answer, so he must not have the answer. Does that mean he wasn’t the one that did it?”

It also bothered him that the head of the Deltaston family had been defeated and that a third party may have taken control of Pandemonium. That might also explain why the Wicked Green Woman had become the White Queen. And there was one more thing.
How did the Pandemonium method work? Was Himekawa Mika inside the White Queen? She had supposedly been a Holy Key Woman, a special vessel that could instantly summon a specific Divine-class, but could he explain the discrepancy between that and the White Queen's presence?
He tried asking about every term he could think of and received a surprising answer.
"Pandemonium is a symbol of a parliament, not an absolute monarchy."
"Hm? A parliament?"
"Even if each individual person can only reach the Divine-class…bringing them all together to reach a single conclusion can overthrow heaven. … Divvying up a single Material among all 353 of them allows us to stably summon an Unexplored-class…"
Kyousuke felt something heavy weighing on his stomach.
It took him some time to grasp what those simply spoken terms meant.
"Wait a minute."
"…"
"That wouldn't work. You divvy up a single Material to multiple vessels? That might be theoretically possible, but can you really divide it back up into the 353 individual vessels once the limit is up!? In the worst case, wouldn't you end up with *a single hunk of flesh*!?"
"Brother, you are speaking too complexly. A loser's mind cannot process that." The White Queen sighed. "And he is saying hundreds of sacrifices are acceptable if it means constructing a thousand-year kingdom outside my control. Do you really think that man who seems himself as a hero has enough of a conscience left to care about what happens to them afterwards?"
"Goddammit!!" spat out Shiroyama Kyousuke.
The information he lacked formed an ominous silhouette and tormented his mind.
Himekawa Mika was missing.
All of those vessels had not been in the processing core.
The White Queen had already been irregularly summoned.
How did it all fit together? Why was it the White Queen instead of the Wicked Green Woman, why had Himekawa Mika had him open the door to the processing core, and why had he lost his memories in the first place? He still did not have the whole picture, but a bad feeling still spiraled through his mind. His soul was warning him that digging further would only reveal despair.
He was still missing something needed to know it all.
He faced the head of the Deltaston family with far more aggression than before.

“Tell me!!”
“…”
“What would cause you the most trouble!?”
What if the many vessels had not wanted to continue with the Deltaston family’s plan?
What if they had wanted to avoid being a single hunk of flesh?
What if they had fought back?
And the old man gave a simple answer.
“Summoning a strengthened White Queen…using Pandemonium which was meant to summon the Wicked Green Woman… If the very, very top is boosted further…there will truly be no way to defeat her…”
Kyousuke felt a pain like his head was splitting open.
He had finally reached the crux of the issue.

Part 2

(Timeline “Past”)
The information in his mind was still a collection of fragments which did not connect into a clear whole.
Even so, the distinct puzzle pieces poured into his mind along with a cloyingly sweet smell.
“Yes.”
“There was a mistake in the job request.”
“I lied.”
“But there were indeed 353 vessels here.”
“Including me.”
“In other words.”
“It was already too late.”
“Pandemonium’s practical test was completed and she was summoned.”
“The Wicked Green Woman was.”
“All of us were combined into a single Unexplored-class.”
“And we could not return to normal.”
“In other words, the combined vessel is ‘me’.”
“Even I am not entirely sure if I am really Himekawa Mika.”
“But.”
“This was not your fault.”
“It was this way from the beginning.”
“It was all over before you had even started.”
“So.”

Shiroyama Kyousuke heard something like sparks bursting near his ears and then it all finally combined into a clear image in his mind. His senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch all combined into a single vision.
He was in Pandemonium's central processing core.
The giant cubic cage had 50 meter sides. Each wall was covered in detailed geometric patterns with ripples of red, green, and yellow light running through them.
Countless chairs were carefully arranged in the otherwise empty conference room.
It was a space with no master.
"…This is wrong," groaned Kyousuke.
He faced the bluish-black ponytail woman smiling sadly a short distance away and his voice rose to a nearly shouted plea.
"But this is definitely wrong!!"
He suddenly found people standing on either side of Himekawa Mika.
It was Max Layard and Ellie Slide.
"Listen, Kyousuke-kun. The White Queen's presence can easily distort people's common sense. You have to have seen that yourself. It is true of those who obey her and those who oppose her."
She showed no caution.
She wordlessly told him they had been working together from the beginning and she pressed a hand to the center of her chest.
"The 353 vessels were combined into a single Unexplored-class and returned to human form once more, but I don't know how long this body will last with hundreds of souls inside it. I have no proof that the individual who has risen to the surface is really the person you know. But if Pandemonium is proven successful and deemed effective against the White Queen, the Deltaston family…no, anyone who is drawn to similar delusions will attempt the same thing. They will be so focused on their lofty goal that they will fail to question the sacrifices."
"Then…"
"It is not about whether or not this can actually defeat the White Queen. *It just has to appear possible.* That is enough to hopelessly distort mankind. If the power was insufficient, they only need to increase it. Either they mass-produce Pandemoniums or they increase the number of vessels being sacrificed. And once they start thinking like that, there will be no stopping them."
"Then are you saying you've given up on saving yourselves?"
"Kyousuke-kun."
It was a truly gentle voice.
And then she opposed him for the sake of her own goal.
"This is only *a hunk of flesh* taking this form. Even if you can speak with me, feel my warmth, and watch me move, you were too late for the original 353 people. We were the introduction. So you don't need to think about saving us. To put it another way…yes. Kyousuke-kun, are you familiar with mystery

novels? The wealthy master of a mysterious mansion dies and his family begins a ruthless conflict over his fortune. When the detective accepts the job from a client carrying a letter predicting another murder, can he save the man who already died? And would anyone call it a failing that he cannot?"
"…!!!!!"
"So we want you to solve the 'original case', Kyousuke-kun." The woman in the tight skirt suit thinly smiled and laughed. "Our 'success' here will accelerate Pandemonium. We do not know if another 353 will be consumed here or if a second and third Pandemonium will be constructed on the opposite side of the globe, but there will be more sacrifices now that there has been a success."
A success.
Another 353.
"Hey, Kyousuke-kun, didn't you find it odd? We, the 353 Holy Key Women here, were all sacrificed, so who were the ones giving the presentation at the D.R.O.K. booths? Why are there Holy Key Women beyond the 353? That is what I am talking about."
"That's a second set…? No, spares to fill any possible gaps?"
"They will be next. No, I…we, will not allow them to be sacrificed. We will not allow a sacrifice caused by our actions."
Either way, the "rate of consumption" was bound to increase if the project proved successful.
It was irritating, but Pandemonium was incredible convenient.
Just like the book describing the end of the Angolmois, it could be used to mislead and deceive people, fill them with anxiety, and lead them to rely on you.
If they were mass-produced and people were able to keep the various Unexplored-classes all to themselves, it would indeed bring an everlasting prosperity to the Deltaston family.
They would have absolute authority in which any tyranny was allowed.
They would hold the divine right of kings.
"That's why you called me here? You knew the 353 vessels were not in the central processing core, you knew they had already been sacrificed, and you manipulated me with the job request?"
"Yes. Because we want you to destroy this place. We want you to thoroughly destroy this Box." Himekawa spoke like a ghost pointing to its murderer.
"Pandemonium is sturdy enough to take a hit from the Lady of Purple Lightning's power, even if it had decayed a fair bit. Even with the help of Perfect Game here, we cannot be certain we can absolutely destroy the living data. And if even a slight sample remains, a self-proclaimed hero like the Deltaston family will certainly build another one. So we thought about how to use the resources on hand to bring about the greatest destruction. And the answer could not have been more obvious."
Kyousuke felt something unpleasant running down his spine.

“We summon the White Queen. And in the way the Deltaston family would hate most. We take the despicable strengthening idea they proudly prepared to defeat the White Queen, we use that to thoroughly increase the Queen’s own power, and we let her loose. The hunter and the prey. We will give the label of hunter to the nemesis meant to wear the label of prey.”
And this would solve everything because…
“If Pandemonium is destroyed by the White Queen’s power, it will announce to the world that this method cannot oppose the peak of the Unexplored-class. Even the Deltaston family will be forced to accept it. This is not an issue of the process or conditions. *This will destroy the twisted idea that mankind can even attempt to defeat the Queen.* That is the best way to save the next 353.”
Kyousuke looked to Himekawa’s neck.
In addition to her whistle, she wore a sin necklace with a number of small decorations.
The mug referred to heavy drinking.
The lips referred to trickery or deception.
The 12-sided die may have been a symbol of a gambling addiction.
“How can I accept that…?”
“And on top of that, we will stimulate the White Queen. We must ensure she puts on the greatest performance with her cruelty. That is where you come in, Kyousuke-kun. You are the only person in the world with the ‘Loved by the White’ Award.”
“There’s no way in hell I’m accepting that!! The Queen can save people? We can rest easy and let her take care of it? That’s just succumbing to her evil!! You’re just running into a future barrier, coming up with an arbitrary justification, and sadly deciding it might be worth *celebrating* if it means being killed by her! Besides, what happens to all of you then? This isn’t just about Himekawa Mika. What happens to the 353 souls here right now!?”
“Oh? You can’t make a guess?”
“I didn’t notice it, I overlooked it, and I thought it was just a biological component supporting Pandemonium…yes, something like a parallel DNA computer. Until I arrived here, anyway!!”
Kyousuke and Himekawa had seen something just before arriving at this Box.
They had crossed a narrow metal catwalk with giant translucent spheres covering the ground below. A quick estimate had suggested there were more than 100 of them.
Himekawa sighed once and gave the answer.
“Kyousuke-kun, do you remember my keyhole?”
“That thing on your tailbone?”
“Yes, but the original designs had it at the center of my chest. The key was made to enter my heart and turn.”
“…”
It was obvious what that meant.

The location had changed.
There was a difference between the original Himekawa Mika and the one here right now.
“After the Wicked Green Woman summoning experiment, the Unexplored-class left, but there were not 353 bodies left over. *Only a single flesh cocoon.* You could say that I am the Himekawa Mika who was born then.”
“Then…those transparent spheres…”
“You understand, don’t you? I could not ignore the remains of the cocoon after it burst open, so I took emergency measures. Luckily, the fragments split into 353 pieces that formed spheres on their own. All I did was stick tubes in them to supply oxygen and nutrients.”
“Are those…embryos?”
“Probably. When you think about losing your soul, you might imagine a rapid aging, but it seemed to work differently this time. Losing the soul means a rejection of the soul’s accumulation and experience points, so the body’s growth was reversed and it returned to an embryo that has yet to even become a fetus. However, the body’s volume could not disappear, so the embryo’s size is between 40 and 50 liters. In other words, about as big as a balance ball.”
She had said it had split into 353 masses.
Then who was the Himekawa Mika here?
No, it may have been the same regardless. None of the many embryos had a soul and all of the souls had gathered in “Himekawa Mika”. She just so happened to be the one on the surface, but she was essentially a new body in which all of the vessels had gathered.
Those spheres out there were the same as unfertilized eggs.
They had the white and the yolk, but no amount of warming them could make them grow.
“Then isn’t that even worse?” Kyousuke forced out the worst possibility.
“What happened to the souls of the missing 353 people? If they’ve simply mixed together, there’s nothing we can do, but what if they’re still in the process of doing it? We might still be able to do something and we need bodies for them to return to. If Pandemonium is supporting those embryos, then we can’t just destroy it! Do that and all of the souls inside you will lose anywhere to return to!! And…”
“…”
“Your own body won’t last… You have to know how absurdly unnatural your current state is. If you don’t let the excess souls escape, that flesh container will burst!!”
Himekawa Mika did not answer.
She simply smiled calmly.
“Say it.”
She had counted on this.
Kyousuke hated that look on her face, so he forced out the resentful heat burning deep in his stomach.

“Say it!! In front of me! Say what you really wanted to say!! Relying on the Queen? You’ll be happy as long as she destroys everything? Yeah, right. That shallow textbook benevolence won’t fulfill your heart!! There’s no ‘next time’ when it comes to saving people. There’s no order to it! You don’t need to decide it based on what’s possible and impossible! You can be more selfish and greedy!! When you’re saving people as a human being, it’s no time to be putting limits on anything!!”
“We have two ways of stimulating the White Queen.”
The woman who looked so much like Madam Professor was not listening to Kyousuke.
She simply watched with a smile like he was a child throwing a tantrum.
“The first, Kyousuke-kun, is placing you by her side. After all, you are Loved by the White. Even if she is an extraordinary monster, she will still want to look good in front of her beloved. If you ask her just once, she is sure to instantly smash the Box into oblivion.”
She continued coldly.
“And the second, Kyousuke-kun, is to persecute and kill you in front of her. Once again, you are Loved by the White. What better trigger is there to send that peak of the Unexplored-class on a rampage? For this one, no one even needs to ask her. As long as the Queen is enveloped in bottomless rage, Pandemonium will overheat and destroy itself as it supports the summoning. …So Kyousuke-kun, which would you prefer?”
In other words…
Whether Kyousuke won or lost, the stage was set so he would cause the White Queen to destroy Pandemonium. That was Himekawa Mika’s plan.
The Perfect Game duo took a step toward Kyousuke.
Why was Perfect Game obeying Himekawa?
Did Government gain something from Pandemonium’s destruction?
Or was it a matter of personal feelings?
Even if Kyousuke used an Incense Grenade to fight, there was nothing he could do when his vessel was working against him. In the worst case, she would summon a Divine-class through the alternative Holy Key Woman method and the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony would not respond.
No.
A practical test using the 353 of them had apparently already proven they could summon the Unexplored-class Wicked Green Woman with the turn of a key, so if things were set up just right, it was possible they could summon the White Queen right away.
That was just about the worst case scenario for a flesh-and-blood human.
“Now, Kyousuke-kun. No, Alice (with) Rabbit.”
Himekawa Mika spoke the cursed words without understanding what they actually meant.
“*Save* us.”
He would be thrown into the greatest evil!!
“…To hell with that.”

Shiroyama Kyousuke adjusted his grip on his Blood-Sign.
He did not know how much he could actually do. The Summoning Ceremony had been almost entirely taken from him and he was faced with a Government 500 level as well as Incense Expert Ellie Slide, a legendary vessel said to be able to amplify her partner's power by 500 Awards. On top of that, a single authorization key in the keyhole on Himekawa Mika's tailbone and she might be able to summon the very, very top. The situation could not have been worse.
But.
Even so.
The fighting spirit did not vanish from Alice (with) Rabbit's eyes.
"If you don't get it, then I'll show you. True salvation has no room for that pure white! It has to be brought about by human hands!! Don't let her blind you and lead you away from the essence of salvation. What was it you really thought while you struggled in this dark, dark Box? Were you hoping someone you've never seen or heard of would be saved!? Of course not. Your bodies melted away in some bizarre experiment, hundreds of souls were removed from their bodies, and Himekawa Mika is about to burst from within despite just barely surviving it all. And you expect me to believe you'll be happy as long as you can protect someone? Not a chance!!!!!!"
Kssshhh
Kssshhh
"Hm, I had a feeling it would come down to this. Himekawa Mika's attempt at the White Queen was the most over-the-top and she made it pretty far, so I started to think it might happen after all, but a failure is a failure. We'll have to make up for this somewhere."
He heard a voice.
It was a young girl's voice, but it was as cold as can be.
Fingertips moved along the handle of an axe and operated the flute-like keys.
"What caused you to start viewing Pandemonium as a threat? Did you think the world revolves around you? There are 353 vessels here, so there are 353 new summoning methods. Just as someone thought about making an attack on Pandemonium with the Attach Saint Project, the Holy Key Women, or the individual limited Incense Grenades, the trigger for you was the summon bombing. That is what you used to come this far. Of course, most of the 353 projects are empty theories and those attempts either ended without even getting close to Pandemonium or they're still pathetically spinning their wheels outside. You used that bombing for a quite a lot: to steal the VIP evacuation route map, to slip past the anti-personnel radar with the crater lakes you had created, and so on. A single book points to a single conclusion and you seem to be the closest to reaching the ending."

Ellie Slide.
Her voice droned on and on so much that Kyousuke lost his sense of time.
Small colorful bottles were attached to the back of her axe and they gave off a damp light as she pushed at the caps like cylinders.
“Then again, those were definitely the words I would expect from Freedom Award 903, but they stray from our objective. Right, Max?”
She adjusted her black and orange witch’s hat with an eagle feather in it and she dragged along the giant armor-breaking axe as its built-in electronic cigarette device scattered a sweet aroma.
It released the scent when she pulled the trigger and she intentionally altered the intensity of the vapor.
“He is extremely logical, so he will come up with the answer right away. If a win or a loss will achieve our goal of triggering a rampage from the Queen, then he only has to delay an answer indefinitely. And that would be a problem.”
The incense expert spoke while showing off her chocolate-colored swimsuit tan lines.
“And have you forgotten? I am the vessel known as Amplifier 500. I am an expert in the small field of Incense Grenade creation and I can increase my partner’s strength by 500 Awards. I specialize in preparing the requisite incense in advance.”
Kssshhh
Kssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhh
Kssssssshhhhhhhh
“Simply put, this phase was a failure. You rejected Himekawa Mika’s invitation, you refused to abandon the few for the sake of the many, and you did not selfishly summon and rely on the White Queen. Now, we must reset the stage to reuse this stubborn 900 level. So give us a little more time to work behind the scenes. You are so skilled that you are a bit difficult to control, so beginning this again now would only lead to another failure. My incense will rob you of your short-term memory and we will set things up while you take your time figuring out what happened. Okay, Alice (with) Rabbit?”
Kssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!
“Don’t worry.”
“We are used to buying time.”
“Pandemonium is a mobile fortress.”
“There is no reason that this has to happen ‘here’.”
“We have fought all around the world.”
“We have repeated this again and again and again.”
“One attempt tried to induce arrhythmia in the heart reactor.”
“One attempt feigned a virus infection to check for any weaknesses.”
“But almost every plan was crushed before it even began.”
“There have been mountains of attempts no one is even aware of.”

“At one point, I happened to meet Perfect Game.”
“At some point, we happened across Alice (with) Rabbit.”
“So.”
“We will try this as many times as it takes.”
“We are not afraid of failure.”
“As long as it gradually brings us closer to success, anything is fine.”
“So Kyousuke-kun.”
“Until we meet again during the next phase.”
Click.

Part 3

(Timeline “Now”)
It was not so much his head as his heart.
An incredible shock raced through the center of his chest.
“Ah, gbah!!!???”
And inside the luxury hotel room, Shiroyama Kyousuke finally understood everything. He knew why he had lost his memories, why the White Queen was smiling by his side, where his vessel Himekawa Mika had gone, why Max Layard and Ellie Slide of Perfect Game had attacked him, and who had attacked the head of the Deltaston family and took control of Pandemonium to help summon the Queen.
The one piece of luck was that he could guess he had not been repeating this farce over and over.
Ellie Slide had said “this phase was a failure” and not “this phase was a failure too”.
(But it sounded like people other than me have tried a great number of methods. How long has it been since the beginning? Are the vessels’ souls still unharmed?)
He bent over with sweat pouring from his body, but he did not have time to wait to recover both physically and mentally.
How much time had he lost?
What were Ellie Slide, Max Layard, and Himekawa Mika up to?
Had they already reconstructed a new stage?
“Oh?” calmly said the White Queen.
Kyousuke also took just a half step to the left.
The very next moment, a deafening sound reached his ears and several slicing lines burned orange through the wall bordering the hallway.

No, it was not accurate to say it had cut through the wall. The opposite wall and window had also been sliced through. Needless to say, so had everything in between. If Kyousuke had not shifted his position, he would have been sliced to pieces along with the furniture.
There were a total of 32 slicing lines.
Just as the hallway-side wall fell apart and collapsed, several strange silhouettes rushed in.
They were Repliglass soldiers.
They had two extremely thick legs and slender feminine upper bodies that almost looked human. They held a two meter scabbard upright in their hands and the sword itself was attached to the end of a part shaped like a scorpion tail.
These were based on the Emperor Scorpion, a Quad Motors local suppression weapon.
But these were special models that borrowed Pandemonium's power to summon and install just the weapons of Divine-classes.
These weapons fought summoners without a vessel or a Material.
They could be seen as the great insolence of stealing god's punishing hammer while ignoring god's judgment.
It went without saying that these soldiers were connected to the Deltaston family.
"The Attach Saint Project, huh? They're only one of Pandemonium's side shows used for camouflage, so it's impressive that they're willing to die for their master."
Kyousuke was surrounded by more than 30 special weapons which raised long lightning-enveloped swords over their shoulders.
"Oh, dear. Oh, dear."
But the White Queen's smile maintained its elegance as she stood by his side. Her white clothing wriggled like a living creature as if to say it would soon become thousands if not millions of weapons that could carve away the fundamental materials of the world.
"I appreciate your effort if you are giving me a chance to shine, but I still cannot approve of you interfering in this tryst with my brother. That would normally be worthy of 10,000 deaths, but yes, as a compromise, I will cut that in half and have you die 5000-…"
But she was cut off.
However, that was not due to the Deltaston family once they noticed something was wrong.
It was the opposite.
After pulling his Blood-Sign from his back, Kyousuke raised his arm to the side to hold her back.
He used his body to shield the Queen and spoke without looking her way.
He used two simple words.
"Stay back."
"My."

The White Queen brought her hands to her mouth, seemingly without thinking.
She was enjoying this wonderful situation.
“My, my!! Brother, oh how lovable you are, my brother!! Hee hee hee. If that is how you want it, I suppose I can play the role of the cute princess.”
(If she takes action here, I can’t even predict the scope of the damage. So I’ll protect her…to save those poor Repliglass soldiers!!)
The Repliglass Emperor Scorpions had rushed into the hotel after receiving confused reports from within, but they were far from confident.
Their opponents were the legendarily skilled Freedom Award 903 and what was almost certainly the White Queen, peak of the Unexplored-class.
And ferocious beasts grew most violent not when they were hunting their prey, but when they were cornered and protecting themselves.
“You’re kidding. This was a surprise attack, but he still dodged Divine-class weapons!?”
“Data link established. Takemikazuchi 01 through 32 charge complete!!”
“The summoning system is unknown, but the summoner and vessel are in contact with no sign of a protective circle.”
“Kill the summoner.”
“Don’t try to fight the Queen; it’s a waste of time!! Crush the summoner now and it will all fall apart for them!!”
The Repliglass soldiers thought they knew the situation but actually knew nothing, so they rushed in to attack. The scorpion tail parts had 2 meter Japanese swords attached and electricity scattered from those. Those divine weapons could slice right through a tank like a hot knife through butter and more than 30 of them rushed in at speeds and angles far surpassing the greatest swordsman.
But with Blood-Sign in hand, Kyousuke took an extremely simple action.
He took one flowing step to the side.
That was all.
And despite that being all, the countless slicing lines failed to reach his body as they rushed in like a storm. Of course, this would never occur by pure coincidence. Even if the action had been simple, the process had involved extremely complex calculations.
Meaning…
“Even if those are divine weapons, they are equipped on Repliglass and are being controlled by mere humans.”
A light sound followed.
The tip of his Repliglass lightly tapped the slender feminine arm of one of the Emperor Scorpions.
“You are trapped by the concepts of distance and time, you follow your designs, you cannot escape your joints’ range of movement, and you cannot surpass the limits of inertial Gs.”
“Gh, ah!?”
The elbow and the shoulder.

The Blood-Sign immobilized the joints and swung them around to shake the Emperor Scorpion. The tail was also swung around wildly…and the sword of Takemikazuchi sliced through the air.
The damage mostly spread to the other Repliglass soldiers. Some had the arm or leg armor cleanly cut away and some had the feminine upper body shallowly split open vertically. And as the armor or helmets fell away, the surprisingly slender and cute girls inside were revealed.
“So it’s simple. With the Blood-Sign method, I need excellent spatial awareness and I need to determine the enemy summoner’s range of movement by observing their joints, muscles, and center of gravity. Those techniques are just as valid here.”
A powerful wind followed.
The Emperor Scorpions rushed toward Kyousuke in a state of panic instead of using a controlled fighting instinct. Kyousuke spun the captured one around and shoved it into the enemies after a single beat. He was trying to get them to destroy each other. He would guide a scorpion tail to stab into another one or he would use his Blood-Sign to knock one off balance such that it knocked another one down as well.
This was no longer a battle.
It was nothing more than a group of nails being pulled around by a magnet.
“You probably needed a human being as a summoner to summon the Divine-class weapons, but that worked against you.”
Kyousuke spun his Blood-Sign around.
He rested his weapon on his shoulder and spoke.
“If you had thoroughly eliminated all human elements and sent in entirely unmanned machines that ignore the human limits of inertial Gs, muscle strength, and skeletal structure, you might have been able to kill me pretty easily.”
He was surrounded by a pile of rubble.
And despite the storm of cuts, not a single soldier had been bisected or lost an arm or leg. They had all been defeated while just barely avoiding any injures. They shuddered at the thought of those perfect calculations and slumped to the floor.
“Brother.”
The White Queen decided it was time and spoke up.
She was in a very good mood after being protected by the ideal knight.
“What should we do now?”
“…Good question.”
The White Queen had already been summoned. Himekawa Mika and the rest of the 353 vessels had already been combined, so it might have been impossible to return them to their original bodies.
However, he had no real reason to continue obeying her request to destroy Pandemonium.
However.

There was something Shiroyama Kyousuke could not let stand: Government Award 501, Perfect Game. Max Layard and Ellie Slide had met Himekawa Mika and the others much earlier, but they had wasted any chance of truly saving them and had worked toward this conclusion instead.
He had business with them.
He also needed to pay them back for what they had done to him.
And if Perfect Game was attempting to guide Shiroyama Kyousuke…no, the White Queen, then it was obvious where they would be waiting.
He would not rely on the strongest of the strongest.
Kyousuke started toward his new destination with only his human willpower.
“I’m on my way to Pandemonium’s central processing core. I should be able to settle this there.”

The Story of a Certain Summoner and Vessel 02

Who would have thought that a beautiful peninsula known as the Green Spearhead had stuck out into ocean there just a month earlier?
There had been a mangrove teeming with life and a coral reef out in the ocean. The surrounding islands had envied the ample aquatic resources. The mountains back on the land were mostly undeveloped, so it was effectively an isolated holy ground. It may have been slow to develop technologically, but that spearhead was so blessed it did not need that technology. Water filters and chemical processing were unnecessary. One could quench their thirst just by scooping up the water in the natural springs. That was the world that should have been there.
But there was no sign of it any longer.
The surface was covered by the color white. Pure white. It was truly monochrome. The sunlight was eerily reflected and it obscured the view like a blizzard, but it was not snow or ice.
It was sugar.
It welled up at one’s feet. It filled the forest, clogged up the streams, and spread past the beach and into a portion of the ocean. The smooth white sugar covered the ground so thoroughly there was nowhere else to stand. In some places, it had absorbed the moisture and baked in the sunlight to form a caramel film just like the surface of a pudding cooked in the oven.
The scene seriously looked like it would fatally raise one’s blood sugar just by breathing in the air.

A man in a military uniform covered his mouth with a handkerchief to make sure he did not breathe in the blizzard. This went beyond his mouth and nose. He even felt a strange pain in his eyes.
As he quickly escaped indoors, he was greeted by an oddly cheerful voice.
“Hey, Max! They self-destructed for us!”
A large corporation that acted as one of Government’s many branches had sent in this suit-wearing man as a local supervisor. He clapped his hands in delight.
How many times had Max been deployed now?
From the Antarctic to Toy Dream something-or-other, he had worked all over the globe for the convenience of the higher ups, but this one was somehow different.
Max Layard was in charge of protecting the corporation and managing the transportation of supplies, but he could not stand the view inside the synthetic tent base, so he ran out.
He saw horrifying things wherever he looked.
There was no hint of the complex ecosystem that had existed before. Sugar was of course a necessary nutrient, but it was only harmful in too great a quantity. Large mammals were collapsed all over the pure white land, lots of fish floated to the surface in the sludgy streams, and even the tropical forest was already turning brown. The massive quantities of sugar were killing the animals, robbing the corpses of their moisture, and then rotting away itself.
On the coast, something like a large castle was escaping out to sea to avoid the highly sticky and thus high-resistance sugar.
It looked like an 800 meter black coffin or giant squid made of Repliglass.
(A mobile fortress. Are they really going to stick to a wait-and-see policy with their secret weapon Pandemonium too!?)
The sugary hell had swallowed up everything.
Humans were no different.
Max covered his mouth with a handkerchief so he would not breathe in the sugar blowing through the air like a blizzard and he finally spotted the person he was looking for.
The cause of it all was collapsed in a pile of sugar.
“Why did you do this?”
He had been a wise person. That strange old man had spoken with the wind and the waves and seen the meaning in the shapes of the clouds. There was no meteorological grounding to any of it, but his predictions of sudden tornadoes and storms had saved them a lot. Max had been deployed to join the other troops in this land quite recently, but even in that short time, that sage man had showed many more possibilities to an assassin who had only thought of the Summoning Ceremony as a military tool and weapon.
He had gently narrowed his eyes as the children played.
He had celebrated when the young got wed and got drunker than anyone else at the wedding despite his old age.

So…
“You had to have known you couldn’t win, old man!!”
It must have absorbed the moisture and baked solid in the sunlight. The sea of sugar had hardened like caramel, so Max had to work to drag out the old man who was half buried in it. His skin and his throat had clearly lost a lot of moisture and he apparently could not get up under his own power.
“I wanted to protect it all…”
A cracked and fragile voice answered Max.
The old man’s eyes wandered and finally moved from Max to the distant scenery.
“I just wanted to protect it all.”
Gray structures cut across the mangrove and coral sea. That facility had been built for the large corporation from Government. The troops had been deployed to protect this area which had no technological means of fighting the rising sea level caused by global warming. They were to prevent the approaching sea from flooding the land with a giant seawall. It was a large project, but the work was simple. That meant the government and civilians colluded together and some foundation or other worked with some corporation or other to take as much government money as they could. However, the work had messed with the tides and a lot of damage had been done to the fishing grounds, the coral, and the mangrove. The Green Spearhead’s traditional lifestyle had come to an end and they would clearly be reliant on international online stores for all of their supplies.
The old man and the rest of the village elders had not wanted to attack Government and drive them away.
They had been fighting something much larger.
They had been fighting the entire planet or the flow of time known as global warming.
Just like most of the Pacific, this coastline spoke of a famous sea dragon with an 8-letter name that began with T. That Divine-class was related to the creation myth of the vast ocean and the legends claimed it had created the land and the islands. The old men were not insolent enough to ask for a new world. They simply prayed to their god and asked for the Green Spearhead to be lifted up just a few dozen centimeters so they would not need the seawall or a new world.
That was all.
And yet…
“The Blood-Sign method is full of safety measures. Did you not know what you would find if you took even a step outside that? Of course you did.”
Max clenched his teeth while holding a body that looked like a dried twig. The god’s power to bring “blessings” had been activated in error. It was the same as how too much happiness corrupted the human soul. That was the identity of this sugar-filled hell.
“You can’t make that kind of mistake just because you’re feeling trapped, you idiot!! They’re divided into the Regulation, Divine, and Unexplored-

classes, but the Divine-classes really are gods. Humans can't hope to do anything at that level!! You had to have known that! Your people had been worshiping those spirits and gods all this time, so you had to know better than anyone how helpful yet fearsome they are!!"
"I was not fighting because I thought I would win…"
The old man's expression did not change.
No, he lacked the moisture to change it. He could not shed a tear or even move his face as he saw the unrecognizable state of his home.
"…I was fighting because I could not afford to lose."
Max had not known.
He had not been born into wealth or poverty, but he had never once been left wanting. He had had food to eat, a place to sleep, a chance to learn, a chance to play, friends, and lovers. The rails had been laid out before him like normal and he had even found those normal things to be boring. Even when he had heard about the hidden side of the world from his uncle in the military and then actually taken a step into the world of the Summoning Ceremony, it had been more about breaking free of the boredom than about reverence. And he had found life there was not all that different.
He had become Government Award 501, Perfect Game.
Even there, he had gone by the name of an expert in the losing battles no one else wanted to deal with because he figured the competition would be relatively light when it came to preparing for withdrawals. He would take those unwinnable battles and turn them into a victory. The individuals would come to a compromise somewhere and he would find a way to lift up the entire unit. Even if they were deep in the red strategically, he would put them in the black locally to hide it in the paperwork. All's well that ends well. Everyone wanted to get home as soon as possible. Their families and lovers were waiting for them. It was all done to help others. He had come this far with that outlook. He was not going to die on the battlefield. He would find a battle he could win or set one up that way. Quite a few vessels had gotten fed up with his self-indulgent pace and left, but he had not felt enough motivation to chase after them. After all, he had not known if he could get them to stay. That meant it was not a challenge he knew he could win. That was how he had viewed life.
And so he had not known.
Just like half of the world was like "this", the other half was like "that". Just like there were those who could win like it was normal, there were those who would lose like it was normal.
"…Wait for me, old man."
The next thing he knew, Max was shouting in the old man's ear.
"You can't afford to lose, right!? Then don't you close your eyes until I get back. It isn't over for you yet. You haven't accomplished anything yet!!"
The situation was worse than he thought. At this rate, he could not even treat the old man. Max checked over the damage to the village, counted the number of people needing assistance, calculated a rough estimate of the

type and quantity of supplies they would need, and then returned to the Government tent base. Everything he needed would be there.
He could already picture the next stage beginning.
The sugar could do more than take lives. It was a great source of nutrients. Would it begin to rot, draw in a sandstorm-like swarm of flies and roaches, and spread disease? Or would the fermentation of the microbes transform it into alcohol, creating a white world where not even the insects could multiply? Would that burn, would the fermentation process rob the area of its oxygen, or would it produce toxic gases? Or would the mountain of sugar become a great landslide once it began to rain? Several different simulations ran through his head, but all of them only made the situation worse. And that alone was correct.
Once he returned to the tent base, he found the idiots were already partying with mugs of beer in hand.
“We did it, Max! If they recognize you for your role here, then you’re going places too! This is the end of our life as Repliglass soldiers without vessels. We’re sure to get new vessels now! From what I heard, a charter plane should be arriving soon for the pre-celebration. So straighten your collar and comb your hair! We’re gonna be fighting over those vessels. You did a hell of a lot more than anyone else, so you need to argue your case!”
“What…what are you talking about!? Have you not seen the disaster outside!?”
“That’s just a weird little natural disaster. Who can be blamed for that? And the truth isn’t going to get out. They don’t have smartphones or even optical landlines here, so they won’t be sending out a single 140 character comment,” said the suit-wearing supervisor while chugging his beer. “More importantly, we were never looking to bring happiness to the Spearhead. The locals don’t matter. This was ‘philanthropy’ work. All that matters is that we fulfill the ad agency’s quota and bring a tear to the eyes of the housewives in their living rooms back home.”
He thought his back teeth would break.
They had selfishly stormed in, dammed up the sea without explaining the risks, and made a mess of the traditional life there. Did they not understand who it was that had put the people here in such dire straits? And this had all started with global warming, which could hardly be blamed on the Green Spearhead which did not even use electricity. The area had been contaminated, intruded upon, and remade without permission. Could this really be called a good deed or philanthropy? Was this what Government should be doing? On what basis could they take pride in their work?
But Max was wrong.
It went beyond even that.
“Max, humanitarian aid is a new form of war.”
He heard something unbelievable.
“There are areas our alliances don’t allow us to interfere with, but we can still build bases there in the name of providing aid. And material

transportation bases are especially nice. Harbors and airports allow us to expand our effective sphere of control to the west and east and into the northern and southern hemispheres. They're all one thrown switch away from becoming naval bases and air bases. When it's about disaster relief, we're at the mercy of the fickle god in heaven, but global warming is a great excuse! Rising oceans and growing deserts. If we choose the locations properly, we can easily move our chess pieces forward!! If we keep this up, we'll be building bases like crazy and the entire globe will be covered by our flag!!"
"What…?"
"According to the military analysts in the White House, this area of sea is going to be real busy pretty soon. The higher ups decided to build several frontline bases in advance to surround a wide area of sea. So! That's why I'm saying you've earned enough points to get a standing ovation from Congress. Max! Let me say it again: it's all thanks to you. Great work!!"
He had not known that.
He had never heard anything about that.
He had simply accepted the ridiculous claim that they were deploying troops for a righteous cause, but he had still believed it would help people. He had believed it would create, protect, and spread smiles. He had believed philanthropy and humanitarian aid would allow him to avoid aiming a gun or a Blood-Sign at anyone. He had believed that was what the flags were for, what Government was here for, and why all of those goddamn soldiers had been deployed. But what was this guy saying? They had always intended to storm into the Green Spearhead, remake the foundation of life there, and build a military port or airport while registering it as a civilian facility? How was that philanthropy? What about that was aiding anyone? This was nothing more than an indirect invasion!
"But man were those old guys stupid."
The red-faced supervisor's lips may have been loosened by the beer because he spat out a finishing blow.
"Or maybe I should be praising the Company's forgery skills. They wanted to make sure it would fool a spectrum analysis, so they actually dug up some BCE era rock to fake that wall painting."
A terribly thin thread was drawn tight deep inside his mind.
"Max!! The 'package' you had them safely carry in made all the difference! It would've been an international incident if we had pulled the trigger, but no one can blame us if they wiped themselves out. This Spearhead is ours now. I really hated the jungle humidity, so I feel like levelling all those trees and springs to turn it all into a year-round indoor ski resort. The Green Spearhead? Hah! Am I supposed to believe it's an emerald? A blade is useless if it isn't made of polished steel."
It broke.
It snapped and burned through.

“But we’ll get paid a tip at the very end, so that’s fine! With all these collapsed people, we get the added bonus of the medical aid. And the double-whammy of a mystical secret leading into disaster is sure to get us a ton of donations from bored housewives and from IT startups that want to stand out. Not that we’re actually going to save them. If they suffer and suffer and suffer some more, we can drag out how long those commercials bring in the money.”

…

———

“And don’t forget that sea dragon! We’ll need something even greater to calm that Divine-class. That means an Unexplored-class. And right now we can do whatever we want on this Spearhead as long as we claim it’s for humanitarian aid and disaster recovery!! The group breaking in Pandemonium is probably itching to get started. And since we’re already planning for a lot of losses, we can easily work in that kind of powerful project. Ah ha ha ha ha!!”

A loud sound burst out.

A Blood-Sign made of ski material gave a roar as it was held upside-down. It took Max a moment to realize the close-range blunt weapon disguised as a stabilizer had smashed the foolish man in the face.

He did not regret his action.

The supervisor was knocked from the table and all of the bastards trying to enjoy the party turned around at once.

The collapsed man in a suit held his broken cheek and gave an unintelligible shout.

He likely meant “Who do you think you are?”, so Max Layard immediately answered.

“Go to hell where you belong, you demons. I am Government!!!!!”

That sounded cool enough, but it was no use.

He was punched and kicked from every direction. Some idiot went too far and drew a handgun, so a scorching heat pierced Max’s side. That was when they all came back to their senses, said something about the alcohol getting to them, and dumped Max behind the tent base. The great disaster had left their unit with a fair number of rotting corpses as well, so they must have thought he would not stand out much. People were hesitant to freeze an honorable soldier and ship them like blocks of meat, so if they respectfully wrapped the body in the national flag and called it a burial at sea, he would be shark food. There would be no chance of an autopsy.

He could see an unhealthily clear blue sky up above the sugar-covered ground.

And then someone’s face appeared in Max’s fading vision. A brown girl of only about 12 was peering down at him. Her clothes looked like a combination of a Western European witch and a Native American, but who was she?

“What a pain. Even a warrior with a raging bull and chicken totem would show more caution. You should have known this would happen before it even began.” The glasses girl sounded exasperated. “A summoner is meant to summon. Why did you even think of fighting without a vessel?”
“…”
He doubted she was from the village.
Her clothing had native symbolism, but it did not seem to be that of a coastal people. And it was because she belonged to neither side that his honest thoughts slipped out.
“Don’t be stupid. I wasn’t fighting because I thought I would win. I was fighting because I couldn’t afford to lose, Miss Eagle.”
“Hmph.” The impertinent girl crossed her arms and breathed from her nose.
“What is your Award number?”
“Government 501.”
The chocolate-colored witch with swimsuit-shaped tan lines laughed fiercely.
“I see. That barely passes. I don’t know if that means you have a weird sort of luck or if I’m just too nice.”
“…?”
Max was confused, so the girl continued.
“You’ve lost a shocking amount of blood, so dip your finger in it and stick it in my mouth.”
“What…?”
“I’m telling you to bind the contract. You have a Blood-Sign, but how’s your stock of Incense Grenades? If you don’t have any, I can make some for you.”
She spoke of a nearly superhuman feat as if it were child’s play.
“Once the protective circle is set up, the summoner is distanced from any internal or external causes of death until the battle ends. As far as I can tell, the bullet isn’t lodged in your body and your organs and major blood vessels are fine. And luckily, there are plenty of spectacular idiots here, so a Chain will be simple to keep going. If you buy some time and stop the bleeding between battles, you still have a chance of survival, don’t you think? And more importantly,” whispered the witch. “Don’t you have a battle you can’t afford to lose, summoner? Then get started right this instant.”
With new power…no, with the power he should have already had, a summoner stood up while carrying something he could never compromise on. There were two things he had to do: get that piece of shit corporation out of here and calm the Divine-class that continued its rampage here. He could ignore Pandemonium for the time being. Once things had recovered, they would decide the area was no use as an experimental ground and leave on their own.
This time, he would protect that old man, everyone in the village, and the Green Spearhead as a whole.

“Now that the contract has been bound, I will temporarily seal away the name Amplifier 500. As the vessel, I will leave you in charge. What should we call ourselves, summoner?”
“My name is Max Layard. As for the two of us together…”
The world police. Government.
He answered while looking to the role those drunk idiots had entirely forgotten.
“You can call us Government Award 501, Perfect Game.”
And “they” began their first battle.

Facts

- The Blood-Sign method uses letters to measure the gods according to human comprehension which helps summon them. The strength of the gods is impossible to define, but the Blood-Sign method ranks them according to Cost and Sound Range.
- Similarly, Pandemonium was used to assemble a theory saying that the same god’s Cost and Sound Range would change if their name is spelled differently.
- Illegal’s member of the Three is the Wicked “Green” Woman who Fills the World with Empty Treasure (l u – o – n p – e – q o – e i – r – k – a – r u m – p l).
- Pandemonium’s original purpose was to increase the Wicked Green Woman’s power so she could defeat the White Queen and to create a thousand-year kingdom for humans that no one else could interfere with.
- Himekawa Mika and the rest of the 353 vessels had already been used in an experiment and they could not return to their original bodies afterwards. Himekawa had control, but all of their souls were contained inside.
- Himekawa was working with Perfect Game in a plan to defeat Pandemonium. Kyousuke’s role was to stimulate the summoned White Queen into giving a great enough performance to destroy that fortress which not even the Lady of Purple Lightning could damage.
- Kyousuke was the best candidate since he had the White Queen, but a total of 353 attacks had been made on Pandemonium. The details are unknown how Ellie’s incense put the other summoners to work.

- Perfect Game defeated the head of the Deltaston family and took control of Pandemonium. They rewrote the routine meant to summon the Wicked Green Woman in order to summon the White Queen instead.
- Because Kyousuke refused to participate in the plan, Ellie erased his memories with her incense to buy them some time.

Stage 04: Who Made the Original Request?

「えぶっ!?　あごう!　おばふがあ……ッッッ!!!!!!」

「あらあら。詰んでしまいましたわね、あ・に・う・え?」

(『Now』Stage04 Open 06/03 13:30)
(『Past』Stage04 Open 06/03 00:00)

ステージ04

原初の願いは誰が放ったものか

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Ebh!? Agoh! Obhgah…!!!!!!”
“Oh, dear. Oh, dear. This is checkmate, isn’t it? My – dear – brother?”
(“Now” Stage 04 Open 06/03 13:30)
(“Past” Stage 04 Open 06/03 00:00)
Who Made the Original Request?

Part 1

(Timeline “Now”)
Below the blue sky of early afternoon, Kyousuke had already built his route to invade the colossal Repliglass mobile fortress named Pandemonium. This would be his *third time*. Several flooded craters covered the large plain. If he swam through those, he could escape the anti-personnel sensors and infrared searchlights to safely move in close. The White Queen had destroyed the solid main entrance before.
At the time, he had imagined the worst case scenario: forcing his way in with the Queen’s power would gather too much attention from all three major powers, he would win in the moment but be in trouble a year down the line, and he would be forced to rely on the Queen. But now that he knew he was only up against Perfect Game’s Max Layard and Incense Expert Ellie Slide, that hurdle was much lower.
As for the main problem at hand…
“Okay, brother, what kind of swimsuit should I wear?”
“I don’t have time to deal with your jokes.”

“But if I’m showing my sexy body off to you, shouldn’t that be more important than the fate of the world? Blue sky, the bright sun, a never-ending beach, and the smooth skin of two lovebirds! I need your opinion to help stage a scene from that romantic adventure in advance. Should I go with the standard bikini? Or a one piece? I understand there are a lot of men who are obsessed with school swimsuits. Oh, but it might be fun to go all out and try out a shells, palm leaves, a micro-bikini, or even a slingshot! After all, after all! I will be unveiling myself for you, brother!!”
The White Queen dreamily placed her hands on her cheeks while her clothing wriggled around and became each swimsuit she mentioned, but Kyousuke was not interested in any of them and shoved his palm into the center of her chest.
“Hyah!? B-b-b-b-brother! Did you just touch my chest! How bold of-… bwah!?”
She splashed back-first into the crater lake and Kyousuke calmly dove in after her while wearing a wetsuit and oxygen tank.
The Queen was truly extraordinary, so she continued speaking even underwater. A little thing like a lack of oxygen was not about to bother her.
“Hrother! This is hupposed to he a date! I am hoing to run out of hatience soon…”
He ignored her and embraced her from behind.
Just like with Himekawa Mika, he supported her while swimming to his destination.
“O-oh, hy. How daring, hrother… If this was your hlan, you hould have haid so. I am more han hilling to offer hyself to you.”
Kyousuke had learned from experience that it was best not to react to her nonsense.
After crossing the linked crater lakes, they climbed onto the land where Pandemonium sat like a giant black squid. Kyousuke removed the wetsuit and changed into his original hoodie and track pants. The White Queen pretended to cover her face while actually watching him change and she did not even bother toweling off her silver hair. The water simply evaporated on its own and she was back to normal.
There was nothing to stand in their way.
They walked to Pandemonium’s front gate that the White Queen had destroyed before.
But they did not immediately walk in. Kyousuke operated the authorization panel to the side. He had used Max Layard’s biometrics before, but he used something else this time.
He used the Deltaston coat of arms he had borrowed from the hotel room. The machine was meant to read the details of someone’s hand, but it began reading that emblem instead.
“Oh?”
“I had a feeling they would do this,” spat out Kyousuke. “Ruby, sapphire, and I think the white jewel is pure corundum. Regardless, this reads the

piezoelectricity pattern in the crystal structure and uses it as a master key. With their obsession with authority, I figured they would use their family's traditions or emblem even if it isn't logical. Plus, if they used a part of themselves as the crucial master key, it introduces a risk of being kidnapped or *having that body part cut off*. Just in case, they prepared a lizard's tail they can safely hand over to a criminal."
"But, brother, you didn't need to unlock it. The door was already blown down."
"…I did need to."
This would leave a record showing he had broken in without any help from the White Queen.
Even if it was ultimately useless, Shiroyama Kyousuke entered the demon's palace on his own. The Queen happily followed him.
Thanks to his past memories, he walked straight to the central processing core without getting lost.
And he of course did not run into any summoners or vessels on the way.
He had no memories of the intervening time, but Max and Ellie had likely done something after taking control of Pandemonium.
They crossed the narrow metal bridge passing over the hundreds of transparent spheres and continued on to the central processing core.
Just as expected, the Perfect Game pair was waiting for them.
"Now this is dangerous."
The man with a black pompadour used his shoulder to support his ski material Blood-Sign with a swollen bottom end. He was more referring to the smiling strongest of the strongest than he was to Kyousuke.
"I can feel it. She's brimming with reasons she should win. But we've got to do this. We're carrying the name of Government Award 501, Perfect Game, so we've got to do this. I doubt you'd understand. Winning comes naturally to you and you don't accept anything else as Miss Strongest, so there's not a single reason you should lose."
"Shiroyama Kyousuke."
The next to speak was Ellie Slide, the blonde-haired, brown-skinned glasses girl with an eagle feather in her black and orange witch's hat.
She exposed the piercings in her ears, her navel, and even her tongue.
"How much have you remembered?"
"I'm sick of going along with Himekawa Mika's self-righteousness."
Hearing that answer, the incense expert adjusted her large hat which shook the sleeved cape with the bottom split into feather-like shapes.
She hid her eyes and giggled.
"Good, this'll be easier if you understand everything. So choose which path you'd prefer," urged Max Layard with his vulgar personality revealed by his baggy T-shirt and shorts. "Will you ask the White Queen to blow us away along with everything around us? Or will you refuse to use her power and be killed by us in a normal Summoning Ceremony? We'll accomplish our goal either way. Will the Box be destroyed directly, or will the Queen snap

and destroy it all? Anything's fine as long as Pandemonium's processing core is broken."
Kyousuke's answer was also simple.
He reached for his back.
He was pulling out his Blood-Sign. Instead of hiding behind the Queen and grabbing at the bottom of her skirt, he would fight as a summoner in the Artificial Sacred Ground.
And he spoke.
"To hell with that."
Several shoes could be heard scraping against the floor.
The White Queen could settle this at any time in exchange for robbing all humans of their dignity, but Shiroyama Kyousuke and Max Layard ignored her to swiftly judge the distance between each other with weapons in hand.
But the pompadour man was confident.
"You're not very smart. Summoners are nothing without summoning. What can you do without relying on a Material!?"
They were Government Award 501 and Freedom Award 903, but that overwhelming gap was meaningless now. For one, Kyousuke's vessel was occupied by the White Queen, so he could not use her. Even if he charged into an Artificial Sacred Ground, he could not summon a Material. Nor could he set up a protective circle. There was nothing he could do. An Award 1 summoner would only need to summon a Cost 1 member of the Original Series to easily crush him.
So when Max threw his pineapple-shaped Incense Grenade, it should have all been over.
Shiroyama Kyousuke did not put up any kind of futile resistance such as grabbing it and throwing it far away before it could detonate.
As soon as the Artificial Sacred Ground appeared, Kyousuke's Blood-Sign struck a White Thorn with ferocious speed.
It may have looked like a meaningless action.
He would gain nothing by shattering the three-dimensional Rose, scattering the many Petals, and knocking them into the Spots. As long as the White Queen was occupying his vessel with an unnatural method, he could not summon the Material he wanted.
But that was not what Kyousuke was trying to do.
"What!?" shouted Max in surprise.
The pompadour man made his first shot. Just as he tried to start the match by hitting the three-dimensional Rose with a White Thorn, Kyousuke's White Thorn flew in to interfere.
The white path veered far off course and missed its giant target. In fact, Max's White Thorn ricocheted and fell into a Spot before it could accomplish anything.
This was no mere coincidence.
After the 2nd and 3rd shot, Max finally realized what was going on.

“Damn you!! Since you can’t summon your own Material, are you playing a thorough interference game by shooting down my Thorns with yours!?”
“Of course. And are you sure you should continue? We summoners start with 3 White Thorns. And *if you hit a White Thorn into a Spot with no more in stock, you trigger a severe penalty.* But if you’re just an insane believer who wants to be devoured by the Black Maw, I won’t stop you.”
“…!?”
Max Layard’s large body stiffened slightly.
And Kyousuke used that slight opening to spring forward with his Repliglass Blood-Sign in hand. He ran right up to Max.
Yes.
“Even inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, you don’t get a protective circle until after you summon your first Material.”
“Wait…you!!”
Sounds of primitive violence echoed through the room as the long poles collided together. The pompadour man roared as sweat poured from his body.
“You’re trying to win without a Material!? And when you’re up against a summoner who’s going all out!?”
“A Summoning Ceremony battle begins before the Materials are summoned. You’re naïve if you thought you would just *end up with* enough time to summon the Original Series as long as you challenged me to a fight.”
“Tch!!”
They exchanged more blows.
Max had used up all of his White Thorns, so he could only wait the 10 seconds for one to replenish. It was only 10 seconds, but that was 10 whole seconds. Sensing the dense tension in his skin, Max immediately cast aside his nearly suicidal pride.
He adjusted his grip on his ski material Blood-Sign and swung it around like a morning star while shamelessly raising his voice.
“Boss!!”
A quiet sigh followed.
The brown girl in a black and orange witch’s hat moved her hand along a silver handle to operate something. She pressed the flute-like row of keys and pulled the trigger. That giant armor-breaking axe included an electronic cigarette device and could efficiently spray incense as a mist.
Strangely sweet water vapor wafted out.
That extreme incense could manipulate an individual’s recognition or memories and it could even cancel the enemy summoner’s Artificial Sacred Ground in some cases.
But Kyousuke was unfazed.
By the time his feet were heard pounding on the floor, he had already circled behind Max. There was no fear or pain on his face. His eyes were zeroed in on his target.
He had clearly escaped the incense expert’s spider web.

“It’s true Ellie Slide’s incense is powerful. Compared to our Incense Grenades that can only produce a predetermined effect, the way she can manipulate the effects like magic might indeed be best described as an amplifier.”
“!?”
“But something caught my attention. If that incense was dangerous enough to make changes to my body and mind just by smelling it, then why weren’t its effects more indiscriminate? Specifically, why didn’t it affect Ellie or you? If she has confidence in her position as an incense expert, it’s hard to imagine she uses some other chemical…like an antidote or immunization.”
There was a deafening sound, but the clashing Blood-Signs were only a distraction.
Kyousuke’s leg swept Max’s entirely unguarded legs out from under him.
“Ellie Slide’s incense uses a cocktail system. In other words, she uses that armor-breaking axe to spread several different harmless chemicals in advance and she uses those to produce the optimally mixed incense at only the coordinate she wants. Just like a spider web’s vertical and horizontal threads play different roles, I’m guessing you kept a safe zone for yourself in the middle of the deadly web.”
“Gah!!”
The surprise attack slammed Max’s back against the floor and knocked the breath out of him.
But he did not take the time to cough.
He realized something before he could.
“I fell victim to this once already. Did you really think it would work again?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke raised his Repliglass Blood-Sign while standing over the man. Something deep in Max’s survival instincts told him this was no time to be reacting to the pain.
“Oh, ohh,
owwwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”
Max screamed at the top of his lungs, but he was ignored.
He was beaten repeatedly.
More than 10 seconds had passed and Max’s added White Thorn floated around him, but he could not even think about launching it. He could not even raise his Blood-Sign. Even as he curled up to protect his vitals, more and more blows rained down like meteors and seemed to slip through the gaps in his defenses.
This was Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit.
With nothing more than his own body, he could defeat a summoner that could freely summon any Material.
“Y-you…”
Even after being thrown into the crucible of pain and even with a rusty flavor filling his mouth, the pompadour man still managed to groan some words.

“You wouldn’t…understand. You know you’ll win…and you can only fight because you can win…so you don’t know how it feels for those who…have to keep fighting when they can’t afford to lose…and aren’t allowed to lose…”
“Screw that.”
This man sounded like he stood on the side of the weak, like he was on the side of the minority, and like he was doing the right thing. Kyousuke felt a dark flame burning in his core when he heard it.
“You can’t afford to lose? You aren’t allowed to lose? And who was it that drove Himekawa Mika to this point? An expert summoner and vessel approached her with some self-satisfied look on their faces, thrust her down into despair, and then tried to blame your own weakness on the rest of the world!? Do you have any idea how those 353 vessels had to feel when the experts gave up on them!?”
“Yeah, that’s right. We’re the worst. To be honest, I can’t think of any way of saving Himekawa Mika or the 353 vessels. No, we only ever pretended to be working with them and never intended to save them in the slightest.”
The pompadour man smiled despite his broken teeth.
Max still had something supporting him even after collapsing. He had not broken?
“But compared to that White Queen, even all 7 billion of us are the minority! We’re the pathetic wandering travelers who can’t afford to lose but have no way to fight!! …So was that old man who could speak with the wind and waves…or should I call them fairies? Even a Divine-class clouded those wise men’s judgement. Then what about an Unexplored-class? How mad will we be driven by the peak of that peak!? We can’t allow that to manifest here! Humans can’t do anything against her! All 7 billion of us will be swallowed up. It isn’t about being strong or weak. We’ll be charmed by her overwhelming presence before the fight even begins!!”
“…”
“So we have to fight by any means necessary. I don’t care how it happens, but we have to destroy Pandemonium if it can permanently summon the White Queen at max specs. This goes beyond just Himekawa Mika or the 353. I…no, we!! *We have to turn this into a victory to save the 7 billion weak humans!!*”
A solid sound burst out.
Max Layard had shifted from defense to offense even though his ribs were broken and he had struck a White Thorn with his Blood-Sign while lying face up on the floor.
“It isn’t that I know I’ll win,” spat out Max. “I’m fighting because I can’t afford to lose! It doesn’t matter how dirty it gets or if I have to spit on the concept of glory! There’s something here I absolutely have to do!! If I lose here…if I let this become a loss, I’ll be left with no choice but to succumb to that Queen’s temptation!!”
But whatever had happened to him, if the Rose shattered, the many Petals scattered, and one entered a Spot, he could summon a Material. He would

have a monster immune to physical attacks and he would be surrounded by a protective circle. Kyousuke was no match for either.
A triumphant look covered Max's bloody face.
"Laugh if you want. Make fun of me all you like. But I'll win. I'll do it for the 7 billion minority and for the fight against the White Queen I can't afford to lose! Even if I have to sacrifice 353 people here, I swear I'll tear down Pandemonium!!"
Ellie Slide's body rapidly transformed. She seemed to spiral around as she was remade into a yellow translucent slime.
But something happened just a moment beforehand.
Shiroyama Kyousuke threw his Blood-Sign with perfect accuracy and the tip tore through the dreamcatcher hanging from Ellie Slide's neck and collided with the center of her flat chest.
"Wha-?"
This time.
This time Max Layard truly stopped moving.
"It's true that Materials can deflect all physical attacks, but things are different when they're only 'half formed'. And if the vessel herself is knocked unconscious, she is considered defeated and the Summoning Ceremony process is canceled." The White Queen crossed her arms and explained while watching on in boredom. "And more importantly, did you really think you could make a fool of my brother just by robbing him of a Material?"
"Gah."
The shock of defeat was coming.
No matter how it happened, the summoner and vessel had lost according to the rules of the Summoning Ceremony, so they would be hit by the shock of seeing their god slaughtered before their eyes.
Still on his back, Max moved just his eyes to look up at Kyousuke.
That summoner had not hesitated to let go of his greatest weapon, the Blood-Sign, but his expression had not changed.
"You were on the right track there. I kind of liked that you viewed the Queen as a threat and that you were desired so greedily to defeat her at all costs. But don't forget that nothing will change if you try to oppose her by accepting sacrifices and becoming a monster yourself."
As he spoke, the Blood-Sign denting Ellie Slide's chest was pulled down by gravity.
It clattered to the floor.
"And if you want me to laugh, I recommend cracking a joke that makes people happy."
"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"
A moment later, Max's defeat was confirmed. An invisible shock raced out from his chest and covered his entire body.

Part 2

(Timeline “Now”)
Government Award 501, Perfect Game.
Max Layard and Ellie Slide had been defeated. But even if the people guiding it had vanished, the fundamental problem had not been resolved. Pandemonium was still up and running, the 353 vessels’ bodies were still contained inside the many spheres in the other room, and all of their souls were inside Himekawa Mika who was about to burst. And on top of all that, the White Queen was still around.
Kyousuke had to resolve all of that.
After some thought, he spoke.
“Ellie Slide.”
The small figure on its side twitched slightly.
After a summoner and vessel were defeated, they lost the ability to think and became zombies in the original sense who could only slowly repeat a single action. They could only obey gestures or simple commands.
But this reaction was clearly different.
After an irritated sigh, Kyousuke spoke again.
“I know you’re only pretending and I don’t have time to deal with it. If you keep wasting my time, I’ll throw you to the White Queen.”
“…Oh, honestly!!”
The blond-haired, brown-skinned glasses girl with an eagle feather in her black and orange witch’s hat quickly got up.
But she was not obeying him in a zombie state. She was clearly moving under her own will.
And Kyousuke did not seem surprised.
“You already did this once in the past. After I defeated you in the Summoning Ceremony, you made a surprise attack not long afterwards. Do you have incense that softens the shock of defeat? I’m honestly impressed by your skill, but you’re only using it for cheap tricks.”
“What do you want from me?”
“I want some help from your incense. I want something to properly redistribute the 353 souls that were forcibly gathered into a single body.”
“I am an amplifier. There is no good or evil in that. Save me your sob story, but I won’t feel any motivation if it isn’t about achieving Award 1000.”
“Stop pretending to be evil. If all you cared about was reaching Award 1000, why would you bind a contract with Government Award 501? Even if you can amplify them up to around 500 Awards, it would still be faster to pair up with someone in the 800s or 900s. But since you chose Perfect

Game regardless, I can only assume you sympathized with him in some other way.”
“…”
“I won’t ask what that was, but did you predict things would end up this way when you first shook hands with Max Layard? If you were envisioning something else, then work with me. None of us can afford to lose. So I’ll show you a different path. A path that doesn’t require abandoning Himekawa Mika and the rest of the 353.”
He was clearly stating his intention to harm the White Queen, but the silver twintail girl only smiled in amusement.
And Ellie Slide breathed an exhausted sigh inside her sleeved cape.
“Did you think I arrived at this extreme answer without trying anything else?”
“…”
“I tried everything I could. I even put together theoretical plans for the things I couldn’t do. And there was no way of saving Himekawa Mika and the other vessels. There is only so much my incense can accomplish. There is no saving them.”
He had expected that answer.
So he was not taken aback.
“True, the two of us alone cannot save those 353.”
“Then who is supposed to help us? Surely you aren’t going to suggest the White Queen.”
“…You really thought I would reach for that worst possible option?”
His voice grew too cold to even call icy.
After focusing on forcing down his emotions, Kyousuke continued.
“Ellie Slide. There’s something else you’re still hiding from my mind, isn’t there?”
He pointed right at the center of Ellie Slide’s flat chest.
He pointed at the broken spider web or the fallen rose.
In other words, the dreamcatcher.
The Native Americans saw special meaning in dreams, so they used that protective charm as a filter that kept out bad dreams and gathered only the good ones.
He pointed at that selector.
And he said it.
“The name of Madam Professor.”

Part 3

(Timeline “Past”)
Himekawa Mika longed for it. Would Shiroyama Kyousuke ask the White Queen for help, or would his death send the White Queen on a rampage that would overheat the system? Either way, Pandemonium’s central processing core would be destroyed just as she hoped.

Shiroyama Kyousuke knew the Miniature Garden developer known as Madam Professor was a very devil-may-care kind of person. If there was anything she disliked about the job requested of her, she would rewrite the script and secretly build in a loophole more to her liking. Just because she found a system coldhearted and lacking in humanity, she would fill the empty space with descriptions that could easily trigger a critical bug or error.

Incense Expert Ellie Slide had feared that. If Kyousuke were to learn of this information, wouldn’t he stop working toward one or the other of the two options Himekawa Mika longed for? There was a chance he would stray onto a third path she had not accounted for.

And so…

“Shigara Masami.”
Inside the 50 meter Box of Pandemonium’s central processing core, Shiroyama Kyousuke had muttered that name while placing his hand on a wall decorated by countless geometric patterns.
He held an analysis filter glass made from quick-drying manicure repair solution and the vibration of his voice, just like the one he had used to read the surface armor that redirected the Lady of Purple Lightning’s summon bombing.
He read the structure.
No matter how precise it was and even at a level invisible to the naked eye, a magic circle was still a magic circle. And those circles always listed the important factors: what it summoned, the date, the place, the symbols, the related heavenly bodies, the important directions, etc. So instead of a chaotic collection of lines and curves, it was a message meant to be read by a human mind.
His voice quickly rose to a shout.
“Shigara Masami!! Madam Professor’s name was inputted into the empty space… She was originally a Government developer. If she was involved in the initial design of Pandemonium while jumping from project to project

before arriving at the Queen's Miniature garden…if that's really the case…!!"
Ellie Slide held her giant armor-breaking axe. She had operated the flute-like keys on the handle and pulled the trigger to activate the incense of forgetfulness.
Kyousuke desperately held onto his fading thoughts and moved his weakening tongue to voice a plea.
To who?
To Max Layard, Ellie Slide, and Himekawa Mika.
To everyone who was using Kyousuke to destroy Pandemonium.
"That woman would never allow such a coldhearted system to exist. No matter what the user's manual says and no matter how perfect the design was, she must have prepared a loophole more to her liking!! The answer was inside Pandemonium from the very beginning!!"
"…"
"So destroying Pandemonium would have the opposite effect. There's a way to return Mika and the others to normal here, so it would be wrong to blow this away without using it. We need to investigate further! We need to check over every nook and cranny!! If this coldhearted system only looks coldhearted to you, then you must not have found the true meaning that Madam Professor left behind!!"
He had no proof.
No actual data had turned up to support his conclusion.
But Himekawa Mika, who stood at the center of all this, widened her eyes in surprise. Her lips trembled and her shoulders shook. Yes, she knew the person named Shigara Masami, she knew that woman's kindness, and she knew her bad habit of implanting things.
And when she heard Kyousuke's words, Ellie Slide realized they were falling out of step. The atmosphere and the trends were beginning to move. More importantly, Himekawa Mika was beginning to waver in her intent to destroy Pandemonium even though that meant destroying herself.
Would she continue on or fall back?
This was the final watershed.
Incense Expert Ellie Slide toyed with the dreamcatcher around her neck and left the decision to someone else.
Not to Max Layard but to Himekawa Mika.
"What will you do?"
It was a simple and thus cruel question.
The answer contained hesitation, doubt, fear, and uncertainty…but she still spoke clearly.
" "
And.
The range of memories to be erased was reselected.

Part 4

(Timeline “Now”)
In the present, Shiroyama Kyousuke clenched his teeth.
He looked around his surroundings once more. This was an unbelievably large cubic Box. Before, it had only looked like a symbol of the malice and joy created by the Deltaston family who viewed themselves as a privileged class.
“The path to salvation was right before our eyes all along.”
“Not necessarily. Tens of thousands of developers worked for years to create this detailed system. How is an individual supposed to fully investigate this monster now? That’s like searching for a ring that fell into the ocean.”
“Who set that limit?”
“…”
“At the very least, it wasn’t Madam Professor who threw that ring in to leave behind a slight chance. The receiver has ignored her situation, given up on their own, and brought out some convenient numbers for a justification and validation that can fight the guilt. …I’m sick of that. I’ll end it all right here.”
Each side was 50 meters.
The area was far larger than a school gym and its size grew even larger when the great height was taken into account. Kyousuke directly faced the geometric patterns covering all six surfaces.
“Hand it over.”
“Hand what over?”
“I assume you have at least a moderate desire to look after yourself as a lady, so hand over your makeup tools. A hand mirror and some quick-drying manicure repair solution would be perfect.”
She clicked her tongue and tossed over a pouch.
He caught it and prepared a frightening device with just those ordinary products.
Those massive patterns were more than just lines. If someone understood the system behind them, they could read plenty of information just like passing a needle through the groove of a record.
When he viewed one of the walls through his makeshift filter glass, he found a deluge of messages. It was like having every page of an encyclopedia pasted on the wall. All the information he needed was there, but if he did not accurately focus in on what he needed, he would be swallowed up by the flood of information.
If he lost control, he would instantly lose sight of the answer.

The answer he had pulled out would likely never rise to the top of his mind again.
If he was simply searching randomly while focusing so intensely, it would likely take years. He doubted the souls of Himekawa Mika and the rest of the 353 vessels had that long.
But he had a hint.
Shiroyama Kyousuke knew Madam Professor.
He understood that devil-may-care developer named Shigara Masami.
What would she do?
Through what process would she have arrived at what truth, how would it have angered her, and what would she have added in? And what *simple but hard to notice* hiding place would she choose so the coldhearted developers would never find it yet it would appear like magic to anyone truly in need?
———…
It was only a thin, thin thread at first.
Not even Kyousuke knew if he should continue in that direction. He suspected it was the entrance to a labyrinthine forest that would send him running in circles forever.
———*If…*
Even so, he grabbed for it.
He felt something solid in his hand and he relied on that slight sensation to continue further. He crossed the sea of countless words while desperately connecting one small and vanishing point to another.
If he let go even for an instant, it would all be over.
It was like desperately holding onto your lover’s hand while being tossed in the waves during a storm at night. If you let go, you could never find that hand again no matter how much you regretted it.
———*If you see Pandemonium activate before your eyes and your furious heart cannot forgive what has happened, then please make use of what I have left behind. I do not have the right to stop the damned project or to change its cursed use, but I still want to leave behind a chance to stop the tragedy that is sure to eventually occur.*
The fingers of his mind traced along the line formed by the connected points.
Once he found that direction, he could see more and more points gathered around. Just like seeing the stars twinkling in the sky after sunset, he could not believe he had not noticed them sooner. He connected the countless points of light with further lines. The single unreliable thread joined the others to create a thick string and ultimately transformed into a sturdy rope.
———*Pandemonium’s permanent summoning of the Wicked Green Woman will, in a way, succeed, but the safety of the 353 vessels is not theoretically guaranteed. In the worst case, all of their souls will either rupture or their bodies will fuse together.*
He slowly shifted the weight of his heart.

He checked on the strength of this lifeline. Inside the vortex of information that raged like the stormy sea, he confirmed it was safe enough to support something more important than his life.
It was fine. There was no more need to hesitate.
———But there is a way to save them. In addition to summoning the Wicked Green Woman, Pandemonium supports 353 secondary summoning systems as camouflage. If the vessels' bodies and souls are bound together and the correct souls are placed inside the twisted embryos, their regressed bodies will regain the proper experience points and may rapidly grow back into their original forms. How to do that is given here.
Shiroyama Kyousuke crossed the sea of information using that sturdy lifeline.
And on the far side, he found it.
A deep sea treasure had been placed there such that no one else would find it. That final glimmer of humanity had been secretly thrown into the otherwise coldhearted system.
———I only hope that whoever is seeing this has the normal sensibilities to be enraged by what you have seen.
Kyousuke's mind focused in on a single point.
He touched the core of it all.
———And if so, please save the vessels who will have been caught in a future tragedy.
"…I found it," quietly said Shiroyama Kyousuke.
Alice (with) Rabbit had heard it.
The student had reached Madam Professor's domain.
"Ellie Slide!! Use memory and cognizance incense to read my thoughts and use corrosion incense on the six surfaces! Sever all the unnecessary lines in the geometric patterns and rewrite it the way I want!! Think of it like an insect's…no, a reptile's incomplete metamorphosis!!"
"Wait, wait, wait, wait!! That's one ultra hard mode request after another. Those grooves are even thinner than the surface of a video disk and this Box is sturdy enough to survive an attack from the Lady of Purple Lightning. That's just not possible!!"
"I'll put together the theory. You read that with your incense too. Pandemonium redirects the power instead of using pure armor strength, just like how a magic circle is made to allow otherworldly power to flow through it. So if you focus on how you apply the power and guide it to collide head-on along the same line, you can naturally burn it out. It's perfectly possible to do by human hands!"
"But!"
"You can do it! Aren't you the amplifier that can strengthen any summoner!? Then do what I say and amplify Shiroyama Kyousuke's power here!!"
The incense expert clicked her tongue and steeled her resolve.

She pulled a small bottle from the belt around her waist and swapped it out with one on the back of her axe.
She operated the flute-like keys and pulled the trigger.
A sweet smell spread.
The area filled with a sizzling sound like that of Chinese cooking. Parts of the dimly-lit Box flashed white as if from a blow torch. Each of those lights was accurately cutting a groove more than a fiftieth thinner than a hair. It was like a tadpole casting aside its gills and gaining lungs to breathe on land as a frog.
Anyone watching may not have been able to tell what was happening.
Had it succeeded or failed?
But there was one parameter even an amateur could perceive.
"…"
Kyousuke silently turned around.
The White Queen was still standing immaculately by his side and smiling.
But a moment later, the silver twintail girl burst from within and scattered in every direction as particles of light.
It was a sublime sight.
At first, the particles scattered wildly like a firework accidentally detonating before it was launched, but they belatedly gathered together and flowed in a certain direction. They passed through the wall and vanished toward the large room full of hundreds of transparent spheres. The many bound souls were being cut apart and returned to their original bodies.
Those masses of flesh had yet to regain their proper form.
Those souls had yet to find their proper place.
If they were brought back together through Pandemonium, the vessels could return to themselves. The original 353 people would recover.
They would regain their stolen experience points and the giant embryos would grow back to their proper ages.
Their bodies would return and their souls would settle in there.
That would save all of them.
Kyousuke only had to watch the process automatically play out.
He looked over to the person who had carried everything all this time.
Only the beautiful woman with a bluish-black ponytail and a tight skirt suit remained.
"This is a present," added the incense expert. "I left only Himekawa Mika's soul in that container. You wouldn't want to lose the experience points she gained here, would you? Both for technical reasons and so she can bear the burden of her deeds, both good and bad."
Himekawa Mika was entirely limp, so Kyousuke gently supported her.
"Didn't I tell you?"
"Uuh…ah…"
She could not believe what had happened to her.
She was Alice (with) Rabbit's enemy.
She had lied to and deceived Alice (with) Rabbit.

She was a wicked woman who had given no one any reason to protect her.
She had given up on walking toward the future.
She had only held the mistaken hope of finding something she could leave behind.
And she had gotten so many others involved for that.
And yet…
And yet…
And yet…
As if to cut off all of those thoughts, Shiroyama Kyousuke spoke.
He did so without any hesitation.
“The next step is prying open the thick doors and saving the 353 vessels trapped inside.”
“Ahhhhh…!!!!!”
Nothing more was necessary.
Himekawa Mika wrapped her hands around Kyousuke’s shoulders and buried her face in his chest. The sobbing woman was not Madam Professor, but she was still a human being with a unique heart capable of shedding tears. She was not a disposable tool meant to reach something else, whether it be the Wicked Green Woman or the White Queen.
(Pandemonium…no, the central processing core’s Box shouldn’t be working now that the geometric patterns have been destroyed. But it would be a problem if they built a 2nd or 3rd one, so I should probably do a more thorough job of destroying it.)
Himekawa Mika was safe.
They had a path toward saving the 353 vessels.
They could destroy Pandemonium.
The White Queen was gone.
The situation could not have been more exceptional, but Shiroyama Kyousuke’s expression did not relax. At first, Himekawa Mika and Ellie Slide did not know why.
So it took them a moment to sense it.
…Hee hee.
They heard a feminine laugh that should never have been there.
A pure white that rejected all darkness stood less than 20 meters from Shiroyama Kyousuke.
She had waist-length silver twintails and skin so white it seemed to glow. Her exceedingly luxurious clothes looked like a wedding dress cut down to size with silver armor added on. That clothing could transform into any weapon and yet her two slender arms were feared as the greatest weapon of all.
She was the strongest of the strongest.
She was the White Queen.
“What…?”
Himekawa Mika stared at her like she could not believe her eyes.

“But…! But if we were freed, there is no more vessel supporting the Queen…!”
The twintail girl did not respond. She simply waved her index finger back and forth.
This was an enjoyable bit of fun. You have my praise for that.
But if you speak up again, I will crush you as a hindrance to our date.
Kyousuke understood the meaning hidden in her gentle smile and bewitchingly glowing eyes, so he opened his mouth again.
“This is a counter summoning, isn’t it?”
“Yes, brother. The Pandemonium Project was developed to strengthen the Wicked Green Woman with its primary system while also summoning the White Queen to be defeated. Everything got all switched around, but if you focus back on the original purpose, this shouldn’t be confusing. …Simply put, *Pandemonium was built to summon two Unexplored-classes at the same time.*”
Kyousuke and the others had destroyed one of those and the White Queen controlled the other.
They could not summon a strengthened Wicked Green Woman as was originally intended. And even if they could, Kyousuke would never allow it.
He would not sacrifice Himekawa Mika and the other vessels again.
“Now, brother, you have saved the 353 who were supposedly beyond saving, but the task is not yet complete. It will take about 10 minutes for all of the souls to settle into their regressed bodies, recover their experience points, and grow back into their original forms. If any critical damage is done to this mass of Repliglass known as Pandemonium, to its arteries or veins, or to its heart reactor before that is complete, what do you think will happen?”
The transformation was like rewinding the footage of ice cream melting on hot asphalt, so would it simply stop?
Or would it all burst?
“…Do you really think I’ll let you?”
“Yes! That is exactly it!! I do not care what is good or evil, pleasant or unpleasant. I simply want to enjoy my date with you for as long as I can possibly enjoy my time with you! So if this will keep your focus on me for even a second longer, I am willing to play even the most reviled role!!”
He doubted he could defeat the White Queen even if he gathered every last weapon in the world and called in every last person on the planet. The only people here were Shiroyama Kyousuke, Himekawa Mika, Ellie Slide, and Max Layard. Even if one of them started the Summoning Ceremony beginning from Cost 1, they would never stand a chance against the already completed Queen.
They were woefully unprepared.
Shiroyama Kyousuke knew that, but he still grabbed his Blood-Sign.
“Hee hee.”
The girl laughed in delight.

She laughed innocently, as if she truly did not know anything else.
“Three attacks. Since you altered the structure of the Box, my summoning here is limited. You have already calculated it out too, haven’t you? If I use my full specs, three attacks is my limit. After that, I will disperse once more and our date will come to an end.”
Three attacks.
Only three attacks.
But that number would come to crush Kyousuke as a barrier more hopeless than the end of the world in any mythology. For one thing, the average Regulation-class or Divine-class would be too frightened to move when faced with this opponent. Something on that level would attack him thrice.
“Oh, dear. If even that is not enough of a handicap, just tell me what you need, brother.”
The White Queen sounded like she was joking and a portion of her dress transformed into a Japanese sword nearly 2 meters in length. She casually tossed it his way.
The blade rotated through the air and fell vertically down.
It split the floor in front of Kyousuke and remained standing.
“Do you remember the Attach Saint Project? That camouflage project summoned a Divine-class’s weapon instead of the Divine-class itself and they incorporate that into something manmade to wield the power of the gods without losing control. Hee hee. Come to think of it, you looked upset when you saw that, didn’t you?”
The White Queen clasped her hands in front of her chest and smiled.
“The ‘White’ Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz). The sword mentioned there is actually my clothing…but that sword contains my own power instead of just a Divine-class’s. Since that is a part of me, it can harm me. This is the very strategy you used during the Guard of Honor business. How about it? I would very much enjoy a sword fight with you, brother.”
That weapon could kill the peak of the Unexplored-class.
Shiroyama Kyousuke could not have wanted anything more.
But his answer was clear.
“Hell no.”
“My.”
“Fighting you with the power you gave me? I’d just be dancing in your palm. From then on, I’d only be able to resist you within the rules you had set up! I won’t rely on something like that, Queen. I’m done with *relying on the strongest because it’s easy*!!”
He had the courage to brush it aside with his own willpower.
He had the character to reject the extreme temptation of the simple term “strongest”.
He was rejecting the White Queen’s very existence, but she gently narrowed her eyes in a smile as if she found that unbearably adorable.
And Kyousuke did not bother with her any longer.

“Mika, lend me your strength.”
“That’s Mika-*san*. And I never imagined I would be on your side. I was prepared to forever part ways with you after deceiving you like that.”
“That doesn’t matter. I’m not letting her cheat us out of what we’ve accomplished here! I need your strength to defeat her. It’s just three attacks!! Only three!! Lend me the strength I need to overcome the end of the world three times!!”
Kyousuke was cut off by a shrill noise.
It came from the whistle hanging from Himekawa Mika’s neck.
“Tsk, tsk, tsk. That’s not how to say it.”
She finally – truly finally – wagged her index finger in her usual way.
With the sides of her navy blue tight skirt ripped and her stockings intentionally torn, that bluish-black ponytail beauty smiled.
And she spoke like a true member of Illegal.
Her voice was as clear as a small bell but also somehow fearsome.
“Say it, Kyousuke-kun. At times like this, you need to honestly shout *help me*!!”
He was caught off guard.
He understood what she meant, but it still took him more than a moment to accept it.
After all, that boy was the sinner who had released the White Queen. During that Secret War, all of the truly powerful had been wiped out, Government, Illegal, and Freedom had thoroughly lost their way, a great many problems had scattered across the world, and thus half of the world’s problems were thanks to him. It was possible that had even indirectly led to the construction of Pandemonium.
So how did he have any right to use those words?
Could he really say them? Was he allowed to?
He clenched his teeth, bit his lip, and just about swallowed them on reflex.
“The scope of salvation is not determined by qualifications or conditions.”
A soft sensation reached the summoner’s head as he stood in that extreme position.
The woman by his side had gently placed her hand on it.
It was just like an adult comforting a child lost in a strange city.
“I believed that sacrificing the 353 souls was the best answer. You forgave and saved a sinner like me, so why would I reject your salvation?”
He had continually walked a hellish path much like walking barefoot across scorching coals.
He had spent so much time alongside the greatest evil.
Even as the cross on his back nearly crushed him, he had needed to become the strongest to prevent it from doing so.
As those days continued, he had eventually stopped hearing those words.
Himekawa Mika was not the Madam Professor from his memories, but just like that woman, she may have given him a goal he needed to pursue.
A metallic taste seeped from his bit lip.

He slowly removed his teeth which had become a tool of self-harm.
And…
The absolute summoner feared as Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit, let out a pure voice just like when he had known nothing of another world.
Yes.
“ ”
Those few words were the trigger that burned down the world.
An Incense Grenade fell to his feet, his vessel partner nodded in satisfaction, and the two of them watched the White Queen smile as dark flames enveloped her.
The final battle was beginning.
The power known as the human heart would clash head-on with the strongest that lurked in another world.

Part 5

(Timeline “Now”)
Three attacks.
Just three attacks.
“Owwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”
As soon as the Artificial Sacred Ground was set up, Kyousuke launched a White Thorn with all his might. It struck the three-dimensional Rose, the many red Petals scattered, and they poured into the Spots.
“Hee hee. Ah ha ha!! Relying on a mere Regulation-class? How brave, brother. And yet those are no more than *imitations that humans artificially created and placed in the other world* to reach the Divine and Unexplored-classes.”
The Regulation and Unexplored-class could do nothing to the White Queen. Before even thinking about their strength, they would succumb to their fear and stop moving.
They could move freely if he built them up to the Unexplored-class, but the Queen’s power would still be overwhelming. He had once seen the Lady of Purple Lightning slaughtered in a single attack. He doubted even the strongest ones known as the Three could stand up to the White Queen. After all, Pandemonium existed to turn that impossibility into a possibility.
So he did not even need to think about fighting, defeating, killing, or destroying her.

He had to survive these three attacks. To do that, he transformed his vessel into a Material and surrounded himself with a protective circle.
That may have been logical for a human.
“Hee hee.”
But with refreshing laughter, the White Queen brought all of those assumptions crumbling down!!
It was not a question of something actually happening.
It was simply the fact that the White Queen had him in her sights. He had the protective circle defending him, and thus the entire ceremony, from all external and internal factors, but he lost sight of that basic fact and nearly forgot how to breathe. Unpleasant sweat poured down his body and his eyeballs were shaking too much for his vision to settle down. If he did not remain focused, his thoughts would have faded like he had severe anemia.
That was the sense of the White.
It was an omen of the greatest and most evil fate that would tear away the basic elements of either world and would not allow him even a normal death.
Shiroyama Kyousuke obeyed his biological instincts more than his human rationality.
He cast everything aside and used every last ounce of strength to leap to the right.
The very next moment, a portion of the Queen’s clothing rippled and instantly formed a double-edged Western sword measuring several dozen meters.
Destruction seemed to recite a single word.
“One.”
Light.
Sound.
Both were entirely erased by the horizontal slash. That was more than just a sword. As it swung around, it came apart and formed a storm of thousands or tens of thousands of thin wires. The ends formed sharp fish hooks, the sides formed vicious jigsaw blades, and the storm of violence would tear flesh and eat into bone. The interior of the 50m cubic Box was torn whitely apart and even the barriers of time and space were easily shredded as the very essence of destruction poured down all at once.
(The Material…Mika will be killed!!)
He did not even have time to cry out.
He forcibly changed direction after fleeing to the side. To avoid the penalty of losing and – more importantly – to avoid having his beautiful partner smashed as easily as styrofoam, Kyousuke did his utmost to suppress his fear and stepped forward. He used the entirety of the protective circle to save Himekawa Mika who was no more than the Original Yellow (s).
A deafening roar followed.
The protective circle could supposedly defend against all deadly factors, but it bent like an unreliably fragile water balloon. Incredibly, it did not actually

break and as the invisible wall dented inward, it struck Kyousuke’s entire body.
He literally coughed up blood.
He had no idea how many years this had shaved off his life, but a clean hit would not have left a single shred of flesh behind.
“Two.”
And he was not even given time to correct his posture.
The next thing he knew, he heard a gentle voice from directly behind him.
His heart leaped in his chest. An overwhelming presence or aura slowly approached from behind him. That alone held enough violence to beat down and bring an enemy to their knees. Kyousuke felt like his nerves had been fried by a stun gun, but he desperately turned around.
That was precisely when the White Queen slowly raised her slender arm.
Shiroyama Kyousuke honestly thought he was dead.
And since he could not prevent his body from being destroyed, he rationally calculated out what percentage he could allow to be destroyed. Until an arm or a leg had been torn off? Until one of his eyes or ears had been plucked out or ripped away? Until a portion of his kidneys or liver had ruptured?
(I should be thankful as long as my brain and heart survive!!)
A tremendous sound immediately followed.
The White Queen wielded no weapon, but that was exactly what made her the strongest. Her slender arm pierced Kyousuke’s protective circle with no hesitation.
Her outstretched fingers continued right into Kyousuke’s chest.
His ribs broke and she accurately grabbed the muscular organ protected inside. Her smooth fingers rubbed across it as if enjoying how it felt.
Simply put, it was his heart.

“Ebh!? Agoh! Obhgah…!!!!!!”
“Oh, dear. Oh, dear. This is checkmate, isn’t it? My – dear – brother?”
His pounding heart sounded like it was coming from somewhere else.
The White Queen gave an entranced smile as she felt the sign of his life in her hand.
“Will you be giving up now? Or would you like to enjoy the third attack as well?”
“Don’t make me…laugh…”
“I thought you would say that. You wouldn’t be my brother otherwise☆”
Kyousuke was overwhelmed by extreme tension and sweat poured from his entire body, but he showed no fear on his face even as she physically held his life in her hands. For one thing, this was what it meant to fight the White Queen. It made no difference if her opponent was on the other end of the galaxy or if she was close enough to touch their heart. From the moment she had manifested in the same world, he had to assume the very next attack could kill him.
Meanwhile, the twintailed girl was entirely unchanged.
The strongest was not shaken no matter what.
“And unfortunately, the third attack is already complete.”
Kyousuke’s eyeballs saw something wriggling in the corner of his vision. It was something he had cast aside but could not afford to forget about.
It was the large white sword the White Queen had tossed to him as some sort of provocation. It was stabbed into the floor like a stereotypical ultimate weapon and it began making its presence all too apparent.
The Queen’s weapons could transform into anything.
So there was no reason that it had to remain a sword.
What form had the blade – that stabbing tip – taken?
No.
How far did it extend!?
“I told you to endure three attacks.” The White Queen smiled. “This attack to the heart was the third and final one. Because the very, very first attack *had already been made before you began your efforts*!!”
That attack had not targeted Kyousuke or the others here.
It had been a cruel attack which made the entire structure of Pandemonium its target.
In other words, the 353 vessels.
“Now, a question: What did that first attack stab?”
“…”
“The 353 souls were in the process of settling into the 353 bodies. Brother, I know you of all people can imagine what would happen if Pandemonium was forcibly stopped in the middle of that.”
She had interfered with the return of the souls to take the lives he had worked so hard to save.
“Ah ha ha!! Ah ha ha ha ha ha!! In other words…in other words, brother!! No matter what you did, your despair was ensured from the very

beginning!! You did not save the 353!! My very first attack tore apart the frame and pierced the Repliglass heart reactor, so Pandemonium is guaranteed to explode from within. It should have been obvious, right? *Did you really think you had defended yourself against even a single attack from the White Queen? That alone is a form of irreverence.*"
The first attack had ended everything.
Of course it had.
"That's why I told you in the very beginning to use that sword! I gave you the choice, but – my, my – you *went out of your way* to reject it!! Hee hee hee. Ah ha ha ha ha!! If you had pulled it out yourself, things might have been different, but you *went out of your way* to overlook it! Heh heh heh. Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! Now, now! Make sure to savor the nightmare you yourself invited in by trying to act so cool, my – dear – brother."
The strongest of the strongest's back trembled as she spoke.
The Queen's ring of evil was complete.
He was trapped and his fate was sealed.
He was faced with the frightening truth that he had failed to save anyone after all that work.
"So what?"
But just before that happened, the boy's extremely icy words sliced apart that path to despair.
"What..?"
The White Queen sounded puzzled even with her hand plunged into Kyousuke's chest and her fingers gently squeezing his heart. She looked around.
There was nothing.
Nothing had changed.
"What is the meaning of this?"
"I understand you and your evil. It was the same with the Rainy Girl, Queen. If I made my decision on the assumption that you were telling the truth back then, I would have brought about the worst case scenario and you would have delighted in that fact. So it was obvious you had built some kind of malice into this series of events too. *After all, you had no reason whatsoever to give me any kind of handicap.*"
She literally held his life in her hands, but the boy still gave her a daring smile.
" 'How about it? I would very much enjoy a sword fight with you.' …Who said that? Don't screw with me, Queen. I know you don't still have that kind of innocent good will inside you. You made an unnatural suggestion right after announcing the three attack limit. You saw the perfect way to throw me down as I obediently followed the rules."
"Don't be silly. Then what did you do? My first attack with that sword perfectly and undeniably pierced straight through Pandemonium's heart reactor…"

“Shigara Masami was a devil-may-care developer.”
A puny pawn could challenge the queen just this once.
The boy could reveal the answer to the Queen instead of the other way around!!
“And when she was displeased with the request she received, she was well-known for adding in her own script not found in any of the designs or manuals. She would always say the system was too coldhearted and lacked humanity.”
“You can’t mean…”
“You may indeed have made your greatest attack on exactly the correct spot.”
“This was one of predicted possibilities? But…by who? If it was in the designs, it couldn’t have been you, brother!!”
“But Shigara Masami altered Pandemonium’s design and shifted each part by just a few millimeters. The body alone is 800 meters long and it’s even more with the tentacles included and there are millions if not hundreds of millions of parts in all. Each individual alteration might be small, but they add up to a great error. I don’t know where you saw the plans, but the difference between those and reality caused you to miss the crucial reactor by a hair’s breadth. Just like you’re touching my heart now. So I only had to focus on my position and adjust the coordinates at which you threw the sword!”
Things had seemed slightly off here and there.
For example, in the break room where Himekawa Mika had recovered from her Imaginary Flashback.
———10m x 20m x…
———17.04m? What a shame. It’s so close to being 1 x 2 x √3.
For example, when he had first set foot in this central processing core Box.
———50 x 50 x…
———…49.998?
“I-I…”
The silver twintail girl seemed unsure what expression to make.
But it was definitely something other than a smile.
“Someone other than you…someone else predicted what I would do…?”
“I later met that developer in the Queen’s Miniature Garden, so she was pretty clearly a genius.”
It was now Kyousuke’s turn to smile.
“She wrote this in the Box’s blank space: ‘If Pandemonium is activated, it will bring about 59 major categories and 187,600 specific methods to end the world. I included countermeasures for every last one of them, so please use your judgement to hold off those worst case scenarios’!”
“…Ah…”
“And she also wrote this: ‘Just because the White Queen is the strongest is no reason to allow her to kill’!! I inherited Madam Professor’s will and, in so doing, I tore victory from your grasp, Queen. You may be the strongest or

whatever else, but you can’t interfere with the bonds between people. You can’t intervene in the time people have spent together. Taking someone’s life isn’t enough to break those bonds! That final trap was probably meant to spit not on me but on the effort she put into planning the destruction of Pandemonium, but these things can’t be shaken by that!!”
“Don’t…don’t come between…my brother and meeee

- The sword mentioned in “The ‘White’ Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz)” refers to the Queen’s ever-changing clothing.
- Madam Professor, aka Shigara Masami, predicted all of the 59 categories and 187,600 methods of catastrophe and wrote countermeasures for them all into the blank space. She seemed to have approached the White Queen’s nature and behavioral patterns from a different angle than Kyousuke.

Ending X-01: Waking From a Dream

「でも、大丈夫ですよ」

「私達は、またいつかどこかで出会える。

その時に全て思い出しますから」

(『Now』Ending X-01 Open 06/03 14:00)

エンディングX-01

夢から目覚める時間の到来

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“But that’s fine.”
“We will eventually meet again somewhere. And then we will remember everything.”
(“Now” Ending X-01 Open 06/03 14:00)
Waking From a Dream

His consciousness was fading in and out.
But Shiroyama Kyousuke could not afford to just collapse.
Slight ripples ran through his mind. And only when those ripples reached their peak did his intermittent vision widen. He was not even sure if he was asleep or not, but he could tell he was lying down and being jostled about.
Was he on a stretcher?
At any rate, he was being carried to a medical facility with some type of device.
“Did you wake up?”
A girl spoke from the side, probably while walking with the EMTs.
A piercing glistened on her tongue.
It was Incense Expert Ellie Slide.
“I scattered the pain with some incense to elevate your level of consciousness, but that is the most I can do. Someone else will have to handle the surgical process. …And with that in mind, there is something I would like to ask you.”
“Yeah, I know…”
This city was the setting for the D.R.O.K. international trade show run by the Deltaston family. Once they recovered from the shock of their leader’s defeat, they would become an enemy. It would not be a good idea to use a medical facility under their control. These were people who did not hesitate to involve themselves in things like the Holy Key Women. Who could say what he would have implanted in him while he was anesthetized.
“After confirming the recovery of the 353, I used the method in your mind to fry all of the Box’s circuits. I did not leave any intact, so it cannot be repaired. More importantly, the White Queen’s sword tore through the entire foundational structure. If they investigate the wreckage, Government, Illegal, Freedom, and the Deltaston family itself will have to accept that they cannot stand up the Queen using Pandemonium.”
“…”
Kyousuke had difficulty accepting that anything that pure white evil had done was of any use.
“I will be leaving soon. Without the great bargaining chip of Pandemonium, the Deltaston family will only create friction between the three major powers and will rapidly decline. But that does not mean the remnants will not turn their hatred toward us. It would be best if I used some incense to bring Max back to his senses and then left this temporary city.”

“Probably. You don’t need to worry about me. This was my mistake, so I’ll settle it myself. But what happened to Himekawa Mika?”
“That’s Mika-*san*. And I am right here, Kyousuke-kun.”
He heard a gentle female voice on the opposite side.
When the focus of the conversation changed, Ellie Slide must have seen that as her cue to leave because her sleeved cap fluttered behind her as she walked off somewhere.
“The 353 vessels will apparently be taken back into whichever of the major powers they came from. The Deltaston family will likely request they be returned, but as the family declines, they will lose almost all influence.”
“…I see.”
He questioned whether those vessels would want to remain in the world of the Summoning Ceremony after what happened to them, but that was not something he could decide for them. Most likely, some of them could not live out in the sunny world and only had a home here.
And the three major powers would want to retrieve the vessels because vessels were reliant on a sort of innate talent and they were always in short supply. The major powers would rejoice like someone who found a forgotten cache of money in the back of a drawer. Kyousuke doubted they would send the vessels back when the Deltaston family demanded it.
This was not a perfect happy ending.
Another tragedy might await them and the major powers might start fighting over where the 353 belonged.
But…
(If that happens, I just have to answer their call again. Nothing says I only get one chance at this.)
For that reason too, he really needed to take action soon.
He had no obligation to let himself be dragged down by the sinking ship that was the Deltaston family.
“Mika.”
“That’s Mika-*san*. And what is it?”
“Sorry.”
It was a simple word.
And as he was carried somewhere, he reached his hand toward Himekawa Mika’s face. He formed a gun gesture and there was a small drop of blood on the index finger.
The woman in the tight skirt suit looked surprised at first, but then understanding entered her face.
This was his way of saying goodbye.
“I will bear the hatred of the Deltaston family. You abandon your special status as the vessel working with Shiroyama Kyousuke and disappear into the crowd of 353 that were sealed inside Pandemonium. That will greatly reduce your risk.”
“…”

Himekawa Mika did not argue the point.
She simply sighed.
“It doesn’t look like making a giant fuss is going to change anything here.”
“No.”
The relationship between summoner and vessel had a few unique traits. Both parties’ consent was needed to bind the contract, but the summoner could unilaterally break the contract. That put the summoner in charge and the vessel could not fight it if the summoner announced it was over.
But despite that, Himekawa smiled.
“But that’s fine.”
“?”
“If there is something binding us, Kyousuke-kun, it is not something that can be explained by the rules of Summoning Ceremony ruled by that Queen.”
She too made a gun gesture.
It held no meaning.
Their arms crossed paths and Himekawa Mika held her index finger toward Kyousuke’s face.
“We will eventually meet again somewhere. And then we will remember everything.”

Facts

- With the bargaining chip of Pandemonium gone, the Deltaston family’s extreme negotiations will likely lead the three major powers to apply pressure to them until they rapidly decline.
- The 353 vessels were returned to the major powers they originally belonged to.
- Kyousuke feared the Deltaston family’s hatred would turn toward Himekawa, so he ended their contract and made her just one of the 353.
- Kyousuke saved a few lives from the White Queen’s violence.

Ending X-02: It’s Game Over After All

「あ、なたは……!?」

「ははーはー!!　よお恭介ちゃん、退屈だから遊びに来てやったぜえ?」

(『Now』Ending X-02 Open 06/03 14:15)

エンディングX-02

やっぱりのゲームオーバー

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“You…are…!?”
“Ha hah hah!! Hey, Kyousuke-chan. I was bored, so I stopped by to have some fun.”
(“Now” Ending X-02 Open 06/03 14:15)
It’s Game Over After All

Only a few minutes had passed since Himekawa Mika had left.
“…There.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke dragged his aching body down from the stretcher. Two men who appeared to be EMTs lay unconscious on the ground. It had been necessary, but they may have been innocent. It pained him a little, but he could not wait around here.
He pulled his Blood-Sign from his back and used it as a cane as he walked. He chose his route carefully and used his smartphone to contact Aika and Lu Niang Lan back in Toy Dream 35.
“Onii-chan, I understand the situation, but please get back as soon as possible. Urp…”
“Hm?”
“Only a big brother can look after a shut-in little sister. Curse those old sacks of fat for making a constant attack of chili sauce and oyster sauce…”
“Tah dah! Today’s snack is a chewy gyoza pizza.”
“Gyahhh!! I can’t stand any more of this Chinese food around the clock!!”
His goal was to leave the Deltaston family’s D.R.O.K. international trade show as quickly as possible, but that was easier said than done. After all, it was a donut-shaped city quickly built in the middle of a Hokkaido field. He could not just take a train back home and the nearest city was probably several dozen kilometers away.
Also, he had to assume the Deltaston family would send someone after him. The vessels had someone to protect them, but he could be finished off as soon as he was found.
(I need to start with the truck base. Supporting tens of thousands of people requires a lot of living supplies and produces a lot of waste. They have to have a largescale distribution system set up.)
The strategy there was the same for a veteran summoner as it was for an illegal immigrant. He would find a random truck, open the back, and sneak inside. It was a standard tactic.
“Oh? Some of the Chinese might decide to beat you up if they hear you calling a gyoza pizza Chinese food.”
“Why are you adding Chinese seasonings to non-Chinese things!? You’re only making me sick of it all faster by dumping curry powder in hamburger steaks and fried rice! Don’t you know a shut-in is affected by these thing more than normal people!?”

“Oh, come on. Besides, Chinese food can be divided into several different types: Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, Cantonese, and Hong Kong. Not to mention…”
“I’ve heard enough already!!”
There were a few different truck bases, but instead of an open-air parking lot, they were mostly surrounded by a large tent like a circus. They did not want anything getting into the living supplies like the food and they did not want any of the new equipment for the international trade show being photographed in transit. Plus, they did not want anyone to know which trucks in which truck bases were carrying anything important, so they created a giant black box with the important and unimportant cargo all together.
However, this was standard as well.
There were sensors and human guards near the limited entrances, but it was still only a thick tent. If he circled to the back and cut the fabric itself, he could get in through anywhere.
A great number of trucks were parked inside, but he did not sense anyone there. For the long-range drivers, a chance to get some sleep was a life saver. A highway rest stop was one thing, but a proper distribution base would have a lodging facility for them.
Kyousuke circled behind the large vehicles, looked at each one, and compared the locations on the license plates and any unique displays.
“I’m about to leave, so can you have me picked up based on my smartphone’s signal?” he asked.
“I can manage. And there’s an important lesson in all this, Onii-chan. Any job you take from those old sacks of fat is bad news. Only an excellent little sister can look after her big brother!!”
“I don’t recall the jobs from Government going much better.”
(Anyway, if I can get out of the city, I can get through this. Metal trash would probably be best. Unlike works of art, they don’t need to worry about how it’s situated, so they won’t periodically check inside to see how it’s doing.)
Just as he thought that, something happened.
A green explosion arrived like a gust of wind.
The tent was larger than a school building, but the uncanny light filled the entire thing as it danced madly about. Trucks weighing between 10 and 20 tons were tossed about like paper boxes and they rolled along, crashing into each other. Not even one of them survived. Kyousuke himself would have been crushed by the masses of metal if he had not been careful. But this was much more stable than with the Lady of Purple Lightning.
People were of course panicking outside, but piles of trucks seemed to be blocking all of the entrances. The guards could only yell and no one could get inside.
An explosion of static came from Kyousuke’s phone and he realized the call had been cut off at some point.

And a certain being reigned at the center of the blast.
“You…are…!?”
<Ha hah hah!! Hey, Kyousuke-chan. I was bored, so I stopped by to have some fun.>
First, there was a giant. A 15 meter man made of cheap tin was subserviently down on all fours. He had abandoned the concept of pride and become a piece of furniture, but a close look showed he was not a single entity. Millions, if not tens of millions, of metal scepters had been crumpled up into a humanoid shape. In both the East and the West, scepters with gold, silver, and jewels on the top had long been viewed as symbols of authority and divinity, especially in patriarchal societies.
But these were all cheap-looking scepters with their gilding peeling away. The jewels shined with a horrible cheapness that not even glass or plastic could reproduce.
These were symbols of an authority soaked in worldly money and desire. But peel back that outer layer of gilding and they became the filthy canes that beat the people to provide needless punishment.
And that giant made of rotten patriarchal authority was bound by the body of a great green serpent. No, it was more than just a snake. The top half of a girl no older than 12 was attached to the bottom half of a great serpent.
That resident of a mythological world reigned atop the back of the giant who was down on all fours. It was as if she had stepped up onto him and sat down there.
This was one of the Unexplored-class’s Three. It was the guardian of Illegal. Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 18.
The Wicked “Green” Woman who Fills the World with Empty Treasure (l u – o – n p – e – q o – e i – r – k – a – r u m – p l).

She looked like a lovely young girl with her short hair dyed green, but the tongue sticking out of her mouth was endlessly long. She also had an evil, belligerent, and sadistic light in her serpentine vertical pupils.
Her long snake body was pierced in places by scepters torn from the giant's surface. And each time one stabbed into her, something like a meter-long bubble appeared out of the empty air around her. A great mountain of them was currently accumulating. And there were visions inside the bubbles like they were snow globes.
One showed a bomb no one had ever seen.
One showed the concept of a bewitching crime much like a phone scam.
One showed an extremely simple chemical formula, a single drop of which would cause the purest of holy women's chastity to crumble away in a single night.
When the extremely thin bubbles burst, those ideas were released.
The world learned of a new form of malice and absorbed it.
It was a dreadful fertility and an abundant crop of evil. Perhaps those were mistaken directions of growth for mankind, the wrong choice among the endless options, and a crystal that would draw out countless conflicts and great ruin.
This was different again from the Red Lady who determined the one and only path.
She was a genius at making people choose the wrong path and she stood above the Red in the Three's three-way stalemate.
Her color was Green.
She threw the world into chaos and she ruled outside the established order as the symbol of Illegal.
Himekawa Mika had worn a sin necklace that displayed her sins as icons.
Then what would the Wicked Green Woman's show?
The mountain range of destruction built up around the area likely displayed her sins. And of course, she proudly showed it off with no shame whatsoever.
While sitting on her chair like a truly wicked woman, that Unexplored-class wore a snakeskin piece of clothing with two pieces dropping diagonally out from her neck like a bikini.
<Don't look so shocked. That annoying-as-hell White may have stolen the show, but the palace known as Pandemonium was originally a toy made for me.>
"…"
<Of course, I'll vanish from the world in a few minutes when the Box can no longer support my ability to speak. I understand why you would want to destroy it, but you screwed up when you didn't ask my permission first. If you're gonna build or tear down a god's shrine, it's only polite to offer up a prayer or some holy sake, right? So now it's time to bully you a little. Try to enjoy this extreme curse, Kyousuke-chan.>
"What…are you planning to do here?"

<Kah kah kah!! Don't get all on edge. I said I was gonna bully you, but it's not like I'm gonna go all out and turn you to mincemeat when you don't even have a protective circle. That'd be over in an instant, which would just be boring. My malice isn't so kind. I prefer to stubbornly torment someone until they can't live without it.>
The Wicked Green Woman cutely placed her index finger on her lips.
<I know the Red Lady is trying to raise you with care. But who cares what that purity-obsessed woman and her fake innocence thinks. I'm doing what I'll enjoy most. I'll destroy it all. This is the end for you, Kyousuke-chan. This is the day you die. I hope you're ready.>
He did not understand her logic.
Or perhaps it was a biological issue.
At any rate, he knew one of the Three was viewing him hostilely. And that this would clearly work negatively toward his fight against the White Queen.
"Can't we talk this out rationally?"
<Nope. And don't feel sad, Kyousuke-chan. I'm the Wicked Green Woman, remember? I'm the Unexplored-class that loves nothing more than insulting people and beating them for no real reason. So you should be proud to be my enemy. Because that means you've risen to a level where *I'll actually recognize you as an enemy*.>
Her logic was clearly different from the Red Lady's.
This was also different from the White Queen's insane love.
He doubted she even had enough rational thought to hold a real conversation. This abnormal being only judged her distance from others using hatred, hostility, jealousy, superiority, contempt, and violence. Just like dealing with an extreme sadist or a necrophile, he felt the extreme tension of expecting to receive a blade in response to whatever he might say.
<Kyousuke-chan, it has to have been eating away at you. The riddle the Red Lady left you with, that is. Humans have a fundamental misunderstanding about the Summoning Ceremony and challenging the White Queen with the Blood-Sign method is a foolish conclusion. …But you just can't figure out what that means, can you?>
"…"
<Yeah, yeah. I'm not going to mess with you by lying. That would actually reduce the amount of despair, which would be boring. I raise my right hand and swear that I will only speak the truth…for today anyway. Now, let's get back on topic. Kyousuke-chan, whenever you can't find the answer to a riddle, it's because you don't have enough information. The Red Lady was fidgeting around like a fake virgin, but I'll get right to the point.>
The Wicked Green Woman gave a bewitching smile as her snake body wriggled with countless scepters stabbing into it.
She raised her index finger.
<Here's your first hint. Kyousuke-chan, why do you think all of us in the Unexplored-class look like human girls?>

“What…?”
Kyousuke voiced his confusion without thinking and the girl raised her middle finger.
<And your second hint. All of us in the Unexplored-class are given a color. Why? There’s a legitimate reason for it, Kyousuke-chan.>
“…”
<Heh heh. Silence this time? But not because you don’t understand. You’re starting to catch on, aren’t you? No, you’ve caught on, but you’re doing everything you can to cover it up. Ah ha ha ha!! That’s right. That’s the human despair I was looking for. Any fear you can bear to look at isn’t true despair. The truly dangerous answers are the ones you can’t see even when they’re right in front of you!! This is why I stick with you humans! This is why you’re worth handing out Awards to!!>
“Wait a minute. Let me put my thoughts in order.”
<No, the third hint comes first.>
She raised her ring finger and her mouth split into a wicked smile.
<The Regulation-class was created by you humans as a starting point to reach the gods. The Divine-class are individual beings that appeared on their own. Then what about us? The Unexplored-class is the laws of the other world. We’re based on colors which represent fire, water, wind, earth, time, life and death, good and bad deeds, and plenty of other things. Simply put, it’s what you call ‘elements’ and the world takes shape because we each support one of them.>
“That’s getting pretty abstract. The Unexplored-classes aren’t humanoid gods?”
<Humans worship the gods because they want the gods to save their world. But the gods can’t overcome the laws of their world. Just like Cronus couldn’t escape Zeus in the beginning and just like Odin must tremble in fear of Fenrir in the end.>
She seemed to be reciting something.
<You could say the Unexplored-class is an anthropomorphized version of the rules that govern the category of the Divine-class. Our role is to manage heaven and we keep the gears of the other world running…or we were supposed to.>
“You were supposed to?”
<Yes, that’s right. That’s right! It’s kind of funny really, but one day, someone noticed it. If we were only meant to manage the other world and keep it running, was this grand system really necessary? Couldn’t it have been simplified further? We each handled one of the other world’s laws and all of us together supported everything, but maybe there was some other meaning to that.>
“Some other…meaning?”
Kyousuke thought for a bit.
“You’re kidding, right!? You mean that really is the answer!?”

<Yes, all of the Unexplored-class was given female human forms and divided up by color. And if you think about bringing all colors together, what's the first color that comes to mind?>
"You were born to create the White…no, *to oppose her*!?"
<Precisely. As the laws of the world, we couldn't exactly ignore something so dangerous. And even if the White Queen was the strongest, her power would eventually be reduced to nothing if the laws supporting her power and existence were removed, one color at a time. She would lose her light. In other words, she could be sealed.>
Kyousuke's heart pounded in his chest.
This information was important. Incredibly important.
Yes.
That was right. How could he have forgotten? During that war several years earlier, it was a saturation attack from the Unexplored-class that had driven back the White Queen. What if that had been more than brute strength? What if there had been a logic behind it? All of the colors were brought together to combat the ultimate white. By removing the seemingly infinite veils of her invincibility, her power could be taken from her. The system had been set up from the very beginning.
The world…
The world was filled with such unbelievable mercy and kindness!!
<Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Kyousuke-chan. Remember what I said up front?>
However…
<This is me bullying you for being so rude.>
"What…?"
Kyousuke was confused and the Wicked Green Woman raised her little finger.
<How many was that? Oh, right. Let's get to your fourth hint. Even with all of the Unexplored-class thrown at her with a perfect system in place for sealing the White Queen, the Secret War ultimately ended in failure if you look at the big picture. She's still doing just fine after all. Why do you think that is?>
"Ah."
Then her thumb.
She smiled with her hand spread.
<Fifth hint. Open your eyes. *You've already guessed it deep in your heart, haven't you?* The problem was how we were a group meant to stop the White Queen but also the laws that manage the other world. Hey, Kyousuke-chan. Let's say you throw a monster into an absolutely inescapable black hole. Now, what do you do if they casually tear that black hole apart and reappear? That's the end for logic and all the laws have fallen apart, right? When time and space are stretched and dragged around and a world that can't explain it is mocked as ignorant, then an individual can stand at the center of it all. What good is a textbook if neutrinos really can travel faster

than light? She isn't looking to anything other than you, Kyousuke-chan. But everything is still connected. Even the ruins are being dragged around.>
"Oh."
The laws of the world had given in.
They had surrendered to the White Queen.
Meaning…
Meaning…
Meaning…
<This is dangerous. Really dangerous. I call myself wicked, but even I still have some sense of reverence. Even gang members have crosses tattooed on their backs and they'll pray to the Virgin Mary when a storm of bullets flies their way. I don't like it one bit, but there's nothing I can do about this.>
His dried eyeballs began to hurt as he forgot to blink.
His throat grew dry as he forgot how to breathe.
Shiroyama Kyousuke stood in a daze as a soft sensation covered him from behind. A gentle warmth reached his back. He felt smooth skin as slender arms wrapped around his neck. The gentle rosy scent of silver hair wafted over and a warm breath blew into his ear.
And…
He was given the worst possible answer.

“Now that I have crushed the entire Unexplored-class that formed the rules of the other world, there is no way to truly kill me even if you use every last being in existence. After all, I made sure to destroy every last law and formula that might accidentally create a way to defeat me, my – dear – brother☆”

Ah, ahh, ahhh, ahhhh, ahhhhh.

“Ahhhh

standing. His body shrank down like a worm frying on the sunny pavement and he curled up on the ground.
He pressed his forehead against the ground in a pose that protected his body as much as possible, he bit at his thumbs until a dark red liquid dripped from them, and he continued screaming while his eyes refused to focus.
He heard a giggling voice.
It was the Wicked Green Woman rather than the White Queen.
Her damp eyes and heated breath expressed the joy of seeing the result she had been dying to see, but she vanished into thin air before she could savor it any longer. She was wicked, but she still had her reverence for the divine.
True to what she had said before, she was leaving everything to the White Queen.
That proved it.
The hierarchy was set in stone.
The difference in power was too great and all misguided means of defeating the White Queen had vanished from the world. In Kyousuke's mental world, he saw a pure white wall polished down to the micron like the extremely precise concave mirror of an observatory's giant reflecting telescope.
"I've had enough… I've had enough of this wooooooorld!! Why!? Why is there no hope at all!? The Unexplored-class were supposed to be the stoppers, but they were all driven out? So the structural elements needed to defeat the Queen with the Summoning Ceremony are destroyed and gone? That logic no longer exists? She can't be defeated and there's no method whatsoever of doing so? Then how am I supposed to attack her!? The Divine-class and Regulation-class are too afraid of her to do anything at all! And even if it's a nuclear missile, physical attacks are worthless against a Material!! Then it really is checkmate. My one remaining chance was to borrow the power of the Unexplored-class to fight back against the Queen, but if we're starting with the assumption that that won't kill her, I can't even put together a theoretical plan, can IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!?"
It was too much.
He had thought this world and the other world had their separate sets of rules, but this was just too cruel.
He had believed it was possible.
Even if there was a great gap in power, skill, and specs, he had believed that the Unexplored-class had its own pride, that those colored girls were acting of their own free will, and that they were superior beings capable of challenging the White Queen. He had believed that they were objects of worship and that they had the willpower to face down the peak of the peak and to stand their ground.
He had believed that they could reach the White Queen's level if they worked together.
And yet…
And yet…!!!!!!

The original safeties and stoppers had already been destroyed. The laws and formulas had existed to defeat the White Queen after taking all the necessary steps and preparing each thing in turn, but they were all destroyed and gone.
What was this?
How was he supposed to fight now?
It was true that the Blood-Sign method was built for human convenience. They referred to the residents of the other world as “Materials” and only called them here as weapons. But what about the clash between the Unexplored-class that Kyousuke and the others had carried out? That Secret War had somehow managed to drive back the White Queen with a saturation attack, but had they known that would be insufficient and how it would turn out? If so, what did that mean for the lives lost in that Secret War, the many incidents caused by the confusion afterwards, and all the people caught in them? What value and meaning did they have!?
What about the loss of Madam Professor?
What about everything she had left behind?
It was all stripped away so easily.
“Uuuu

He was faced with the absolute difference in strength seen in a parent smiling at their small child as he walks for the very first time. He was like a monstrous baby that had grown fat in a cradle removed from all danger by the adults and then mistakenly believed his own possibilities were endless despite never putting in any work of his own. He was conceited. He was shameless.
This was why the Red Lady had been so exasperated and said he was misguided.
He could not win.
The stairway to victory was missing.
It was like playing a game of baseball where the other team was at bat from beginning to end. There was no coming from behind for a win there. It was like playing a game of soccer where the other team's goal had been removed. No offensive play would ever score a point.
This was breaking the rules to that extent.
Even if he desperately practiced every single day to prepare for the game, this malice would turn all of his efforts into a jest.
He was a fool.
He was an unbelievable fool for continuing to rely on and entrust his life in something like this.
If he was to truly defeat the White Queen, he had to escape that curse first.
But was there any way in this world to oppose the Queen without using the Summoning Ceremony? And if it did not yet exist, was it possible for an individual like Kyousuke to construct one? How long would it take? Decades? Centuries? Millennia? How many levels would human civilization have to evolve to reach that point?
"Ah, ahh, ahhh, ahhhh…"
He eventually lost the strength to continue screaming.
His vision grew dark and he no longer knew where he was.
It did not matter.
It was the same no matter where he was.
Could he find any peace at all in this hopeless world? Even if he walked across the world from one end to the other and even if he looked around the other world hidden behind it, could he find anywhere to escape the White Queen?
The answer was simple: no.
There was no escape.
"…I can't take it anymore…"
Shiroyama Kyousuke repeated that phrase under his breath as he lay curled up on the ground.
He seemed to be begging for forgiveness.
He seemed to be cursing the entire world.
He repeated it again and again.
I can't take it anymore.
And then he heard a solid sound.

His soul had broken long ago. His senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch had shattered, leaving him in a world of pure darkness, so that external stimulus was refreshing.
But he did not react like he normally would.
His entire body jumped like a frightened child.
A familiar face had arrived next to the pathetic boy.
It was the Red Lady.
That two-horned woman wore a kimono with a one piece swimsuit and her red eyes were feared as that which not only saw through to all calamity, but defined it as well. Her long red hair was connected to countless gears towering behind her and she controlled the world's destiny.
Her eyes were closed and there was no contempt or scorn on her face.
Her face only displayed sorrow and grief.
But…
Even so…
"Why are you here…?"
Unable to get up, Kyousuke roared up at her with fear and hatred in his eyes.
"Why are you here now!? Are you here to laugh at me!? Are you here to mock me for getting all worked up over a fight I could never win because I was dancing in her palm from the beginning!? Are you here to look down on the loser who has nothing left after you allowed me to continue on until the despair found me!?"
The Red Lady did not immediately reply.
She let the poor child of man finish speaking and only then shook her head.
<Stand up.>
She spoke in a gentle but solid voice.
<Shout as much as you want and spit out everything you wish to say. Once you have released everything that has built up in your chest, then stand up once more, Shiroyama Kyousuke. Even if the rest of the human population cannot do it, you should have the power to fight this despair.>
His eyes contained the light of a wounded animal.
He bared his teeth in his misguided backlash and belligerence.
"Why? Why do I have to keep going? Screw that. This was supposed to be your role, wasn't it!? This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't let the White Queen escape! When you saw me desperately asking for help, you must have laughed at me because the world, the future, and destiny had long since been handed over to the Queen!! Dammit. I trusted you…I trusted the rules of the world!! I trusted that the laws…that you were just!! I trusted that there was still an ounce of kindness left and that everything would work out if I diligently worked to defend it!! But you made a fool of me!! Why!? Why is this cruel system the only thing leeeeeft!?"
<Shiroyama Kyousuke.>
No matter how much he wailed at her, the Unexplored-class was unshaken.
Because she understood.

The Red Lady could see through to any truth, so she deeply understood the boy’s pain.
So she would never reject it.
She kindly accepted it all and spoke.
<It is true that you cannot defeat the White Queen…no, defeat the entirety of the Unexplored-class where she stands at the center. Not because you are inexperienced, but because it is simply impossible even if all of mankind works together. Even my eyes cannot see a vision of anyone defeating that Queen…that true monster who reached for all the laws of that world and twisted them as she saw fit. That is what this is.>
In other words, this was a predetermined future.
Even if thousands or millions of options spread out before his eyes, the all too obvious answer was that he could never reach that point.
<But you promised, did you not?>
“…”
After saying that, the Red Lady placed the tiniest sliver of hope on top of her sorrow.
<You swore you would shatter that cruel destiny and defeat the White Queen…defeat us, did you not?>

Facts

- The Wicked Green Woman of the Unexplored-class Three is belligerent and sadistic, so she deepens her understanding of others by harming them. She gives humans Awards because she sees them as suitable toys and as bait to trigger conflicts between humans.
- The Divine-class are the residents of the other world and the Unexplored-class manage the laws of the other world. Also, the Unexplored-class were meant to bring together those laws to take away the White Queen’s power and strength one at a time and ultimately seal her inside the other world.
- But the White Queen was so extraordinary that she took control of them instead.
- And in so doing, the laws and formulas needed to truly defeat the White Queen were destroyed and vanished from the Summoning Ceremony. In other words, the Queen cannot be truly defeated even if every being in existence challenged her at once. No matter what.

- The Red Lady has succumbed to the White Queen and yet sympathizes with the humans like Kyousuke and she desires for all of the Unexplored-class, including herself, to be destroyed if it is necessary to defeat the White Queen. …But perhaps that is because she knows that is a dream that can never come true.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke will ultimately stand up once more. He will wipe the tears from his eyes and pile back up the rubble to challenge that heavenly girl with his own strength.
- And *that is why* the White Queen finds that boy so unbearably adorable.

Afterword

「……」

「……」

(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)

あとがき

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“……”
“……”
(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)
Afterword

And that is Volume 4.
This is Kamachi Kazuma.
The theme this time was memories. I focused a bit on using a layered timeline by telling the story of Present A while referencing Past B and using Past B to focus on Madam Professor from the even older Timeline C. And Madam Professor from the older Timeline C came back and influenced Present A. I worked to create a complicated structure to corner Shiroyama Kyousuke while also making it look like a single line as a whole, but it’s up to you all to judge how well I did.
Kyousuke’s past is still a mystery, but the references to Madam Professor show that it was not an entirely cruel past like Biondetta claimed it was in Volume 3. Of course, there is a difference between Biondetta who was only involved in the Queen’s Miniature Garden and Kyousuke who was also involved in the attempt to fully destroy the White Queen, but it all comes down to how they interpret it. Part of the reason Biondetta felt so alone was due to closing herself in a shell.
But this also points to the possibility of Kyousuke himself holding a contradiction inside. Isabelle touched on this at the end of Volume 3, but have all of you noticed it?
The stage this time was the mobile fortress of Pandemonium and I based it off of that city which is also translated into Japanese as the Palace of Many Demons. Dammit, I made a mobile fortress but I didn’t have a single scene of it moving!! Anyway, I found it interesting that, despite being the palace of demons, the decisions are not based on the decree of the great demonic ruler but by a council of demons who debate amongst themselves. And to continue with the demon motif, I made it look like a squid. …But they’re so tasty.
Using many vessels to summon a single Unexplored-class might sound tricky, but any summoning ceremony above a certain level tends to involve a group instead of an individual. Summoning ceremonies in modern Western magic divide the people into different roles (e.g. priests, priestesses, angels, etc.) and invite in a special power or being by following the story of a myth like they’re performing a play. A more close-to-home example might be the Shinto rituals performed by groups during festivals or parades. The Mikoshi is a vehicle of the gods moved by human hands, so you can say it invites a god in at a specific location according to a human schedule.
With Himekawa Mika, I focused on giving her the position of an older woman, something we hadn’t seen much of in Kyousuke’s partners. Unlike

Benikomichi Fuuki or Biondetta, she was more than just older than him. Perhaps because he was supposed to be the strongest, I realized I hadn't been able to give him a vessel who could rub his head and tell him to ask for help.
Unlike with the vessels, Himekawa Mika did not argue the point and returned his gun gesture on equal footing with him. I think that showed something else the other vessels couldn't do. I wanted to show that adults and children say goodbye with a different density(?) or that a proper adult knows how to say goodbye. …That's still too much to ask of me, though.
Moving on to the enemies: Max Layard and Incense Expert Ellie Slide of Perfect Game. I actually had these two appear as side characters in Volumes 1 and 2. I think using them like this creates a sort of "thickness" as the number of volumes grows, so it makes me kind of happy. Max is a specialist at the world police idea of turning anything into a victory and Ellie rejects all emotional arguments and purely seeks Award 1000. I focused on making them types of characters we hadn't seen in the main positions yet.
His Award was Government 501. You might think "Is that all!?", but if I can't get past that here, I would only be able to have high Award summoners appear from here on. But I think he shined brightest when he was at his weakest and punched out that corporate supervisor without using the Summoning Ceremony.
He seems somewhat insignificant and "normal" compared to Azalea Magentarain and Benikomichi Fuuki, but I kind of like tricky tactics like that. I think he was the perfect opponent for pointing out that the Summoning Ceremony battle begins before the first Material is summoned. We've seen this with Imagine Breaker in another series, but the people who fully rely on a supernatural power are especially shocked when it's taken from them. Perhaps an elite summoner like Azalea would have easily fallen into Ellie Slide's trap? If so, we can only pray for her old butler's luck in battle. On the other hand, I think Lu Niang Lan would have destroyed her with a single karate chop and a smile on her face.
Another unique feature of this volume was putting in the White Queen from the very beginning and keeping her around throughout. That was the opposite if the usual long buildup to the Queen. Kyousuke and the Queen truly are nemeses, but instead of just having them fight, I wanted to create a strange situation where they're sharing a dinner at the same table and discussing the end of the world. And from there I fleshed it out into an actual date like you would expect of a Dengeki Bunko novel. I think the casting was different from normal, but what did you think?
Some of you readers may have been thinking Kyousuke could instantly defeat his opponents if he just asked the Queen instead of going through all those steps. You may have been irritated seeing him intentionally avoid that shortest path to his goal. And you aren't wrong. But don't forget that that that very feeling is the Queen's temptation that is always tormenting him.

Plus, this series has already given you a few examples of what happens to any summoner who relies on and grows dependent on that obvious strength. Opposing the White Queen isn't an issue of pure specs. In a way, it starts by ridding yourself of that hesitation that appears before the battle even begins.

Now, then. As you know if you read through to the end, this volume had another shocking ending. If you couldn't believe this was revealed in only the 4th volume, then I couldn't be happier. Both Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen are known as the strongest, but I was wondering if I could create something new that treated that term as something negative instead of something positive.

As I mentioned in Volume 1's afterword, Kyousuke's idea of the strongest is another word for the fear of reaching his limit and being unable to grow any further. And then he reaches this ending. As the strongest, he cannot hope to improve after training and he cannot hope to find hidden talent that provides a miraculous power up. I think that is why he could express such raw despair.

Now, what do you think of the situation the White Queen has presented him with?

At first glance, it looks like a hopeless dead end.

What options remain?

The simplest one is to just give up. You could give in to the silver twintailed Queen, submit to her because you can never defeat her, and then lose yourself in her strength and cuteness. That might be one possibility. As long as you can forget the initial humiliation, you might enjoy being what they call peerless.

But if you would hope for something other than that, here is a slight hint. Carefully read back over all of the Summoning Ceremony rules given in the Facts sections. The Queen claims to have sealed away every possibility, but she has missed something and an opening exists. It is like threading a needle, but hope still exists. And it is not hidden. It has been in the open from the beginning. If you do not let the White Queen's overwhelming light lead you astray and you view the rules built up by human hands, you might just see a different path.

In my other series A Certain Magical Index, I build up a detailed miniature garden and then provide the trilling feeling of tearing it down while taking the first step with an emotional argument. But this is the opposite. The White Queen has walked 10 or even 100 steps ahead, but can she be sealed inside the miniature garden and defeated with the human rules? Can the human strongest stand up to the monstrous strongest? I wrote this thinking that challenge would provide a sort of catharsis.

This is not a flat path. Shiroyama Kyousuke will feel despair again and again and the Wicked Green Woman(’s spoilers?) sent things into a downward spiral where he is not even allowed to prepare for his defeat.

But I think true strength is found in the way he continues to walk down that hellish path. Instead of physical strength, willpower, skills, or specs, it is found in this protagonist who was only allowed to be the strongest. To put it another way, he always avoided anything that would work against him because he was afraid of losing, so now he has to learn how to lose properly and then crawl back up.
I hope that as you read this you briefly shared the same despair that Shiroyama Kyousuke felt. And I very, very much hope that I demonstrated the human strength needed to not give up after feeling that despair.
If so, this will surely lead to the beginning of the counterattack against the peak of the peak.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Ikawa Waki-san and my editors Miki-san, Onodera-san, and Anan-san. Pandemonium had to be a lot of trouble both inside and out. And this one also had plenty of the White Queen's two conflicting sides: cute and frightening. I think I'm asking for an unseen factor (even though we're talking about illustrations) with my requests for her, so thank you very much for going along with my ridiculous requests each time.
I also give my thanks to the readers. I focused on giving the White Queen thoroughly and undeniably inhuman strength. But I think that is why she is worth challenging. This might be different from the thrill usually seen in the "strongest", but this is the story of the strongest I most wanted to tell. I hope you will continue to stick with me.

And I will end this here.

By the way, how far along the spectrum of non-human girls do you still find them moe?
-Kamachi Kazuma

?

“It” was a lot like the beating of a heart.
A boy was curled up in the depths of true despair. His arms and legs were drawn in, his forehead was scraping against the ground, his body was curled up, and he was trembling ever so slightly. His eyes were squeezed shut, his teeth were clenched together, and he floated in psychological darkness as if to push away this hopeless reality as much as possible.
But none if it mattered.
“It” was deeply connected to the boy’s heart and body, but he had no control over it.
His heart whispered for him to give up.
He wanted to.
But he had a thought.
He was clearly a human here.
It would be easy to stop breathing, stop his heart, and give up on it all. Looking at just himself, he could easily end it all at any time. But that would change nothing for the world. A single life would give up and the Queen’s violence would continue.
Was that okay?
Was that really okay?
Even if the boy vanished, the world would not. Who would remain in that world? The concept of karma was already in tatters, the idea of just deserts no longer applied, and both unreasonable suffering and absurd fear ran rampant. What would happen to the people there if they lost the means of salvation that could desperately pull a few of them to safety?
He could despair in himself.
He could despair in the world.
He could despair in the Queen.
But how could he despair in any one of them? How could he abandon the girls he had saved, pretend it had not happened, and sit idly by as they sank back into that sea of blood?
Someone had asked for help.
Those twin sisters had initially looked nothing alike with their black and blonde hair. The one had wished to save the other from the giant worshipping group named Guard of Honor. The other had wished to save the first from the Queen’s game.
Someone else had asked for help.

A girl had been attacked and turned into a ghost on a rainy day. Her story had already ended. But a number of factors and countless places had overlapped in that city and she had wanted to live, to grow up, and to become someone that a certain someone else could respect, even if it meant distorting all of that.
Someone had shouted for help.
A vessel had been polished to the limit by artificial means. She had wanted to free her friend from the desire for revenge that should never have been acted on but was drawn out by a demon who saw herself as a tool of revenge.
Someone had definitely shouted for help in this piece of shit world.
A woman had looked just like Madam Professor. 353 vessels had lost their bodies and souls and yet had worked to manipulate both Alice (with) Rabbit and the White Queen to ensure it never happened again.
There were more and more and more and more.
He had met many Alices. Their situations had been truly awful and no one would have blamed them if they resented everything they saw, but those girls had continued to look ahead. They had continued to believe there was a way ahead. And they had reached out and grabbed that tiny speck of hope left in this hopelessly filthy world.
Could he take that away?
Could he give up?
Could he rob them of that?
Could he steal away the light they had so desperately reached for and throw them back into the mud known as the Queen? And this time, there would be no going back. He knew that bog was truly bottomless.
“How can I…?”
The boy…
Shiroyama Kyousuke spoke quietly while still curled up.
“How can I do that?”
His voice gradually grew louder as it escaped the gaps between his clenched teeth.
There was a fire in his chest.
His uncontrollable pulse circulated something to his entire body.
“Yes, yes. I will fight back…”
And he finally raised his head.
He once more faced a barren world void of any hope.
He was truly Alice (with) Rabbit. Freedom Award 903 made a powerful announcement.
“I will fight back, I will dig in my heels, and I will continue to struggle!! How can I give up here? Even if this world is a labyrinth with all the exits removed and even if this is a one-sided chess board leaving no way to put white in checkmate! I will still do whatever it takes to put together a means of defeating the Queen!!!!!”
A tremendous sound filled the air.

After curling up for so long, Shiroyama Kyousuke gathered strength in all his muscles to force apart his skin that had stuck together and he once more stood tall to face the world.
He blew away the psychological darkness.
And in that scene that existed in the real world, he ignored his reeling head and the wounds on his chest as he spread his arms, bent backwards, and roared toward heaven with all his might.
“You sit up there in the deepest, deepest depths of the other world and you laugh all you like! You gave me the name Alice (with) Rabbit!! And I, Shiroyama Kyousuke, will be the summoner who makes the impossible possibleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!!!!”
The boy would no longer hesitate.
He had become aware of another weakness, stepped past it, and grown stronger.
The summoners who used Blood-Signs to use the gods in heaven as stepping stones had a certain rule:
Don’t reject the fear.
Accept the fear and smile at the fact that a method like that even exists.

Somewhere at some time, a monster giggled with her hands behind her head. Her silver hair was worn in twintails and her white wedding dress had been made even more splendid and had silver decorations added in places.
When she recalled that adorable, adorable boy’s words and reflected on them, she almost always gained that happy expression.
He had said this:
“I later met that developer in the Queen’s Miniature Garden, so she was pretty clearly a genius.”
A certain person had written her own words into the excess space in a corner of Pandemonium’s mainframe.
Shigara Masami was one of those involved in that boy and that girl’s very foundation.
“She wrote this in the Box’s blank space: ‘If Pandemonium is activated, it will bring about 59 major categories and 187,600 specific methods to end the world. I included countermeasures for every last one of them, so please use your judgement to hold off those worst case scenarios’!”
Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen.
This woman of extraordinary intelligence had set foot in the inviolable space between them.
Or a trace of her had.
“And she also wrote this: ‘Just because the White Queen is the strongest is no reason to allow her to kill’!! I inherited Madam Professor’s will and, in so doing, I tore victory from your grasp, Queen. You may be the strongest or whatever else, but you can’t interfere with the bonds between people. You can’t intervene in the time people have spent together. Taking someone’s

life isn’t enough to break those bonds! That final trap was probably meant to spit not on me but on the effort she put into planning the destruction of Pandemonium, but these things can’t be shaken by that!!”
Of course he had relied on it.
The boy must have felt incredible relief when he had found it.
Just like a kitten desperately kneading a freshly washed towel because it could never forget the warmth of its mother.
But there was one thing the boy did not know.
Only the Queen knew.
Just because the White Queen is the strongest is no reason to allow her to kill.
The boy had clung to that decisive statement.
It was true that sounded like a request to defeat the Queen as quickly as possible to keep the damage to a minimum.
But at the same time, didn’t a slight change of viewpoint provide a different interpretation?
Do not let the White Queen be a bad person any longer.
Return her to her senses.
He had overlooked it.
It had all been right in front of his eyes, but he had performed the search wrong.
One side of the coin was painted white and the other black. Shiroyama Kyousuke had flipped the coin and placed it on the back of his hand. And he had been satisfied after simply looking at which side pointed up.
Perhaps that sort of paper-thin difference perfectly described the close yet distant relationship between the summoner and the Queen who could never cross paths.
“Yes, but…”
The White Queen alone giggled with her hands behind her head.
She thoroughly reflected on that wonderfully stimulating result.
“It would be quite boring if that tear-jerking farce was enough for you to wither away, brother.”
The White Queen once more disappeared into the light.
She was looking forward to her next encounter with someone.
For the next battle, for another date, for a hopeless hell.

A path of conflict was blooming.
In a way, it was the stage on which the rabbit and **** could most shine.
The seeds had been sown, watered, and given plenty of sunlight.
The dreaming girl only had to wait for her psychedelic flower of love to bloom.

Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign — Volume 04

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